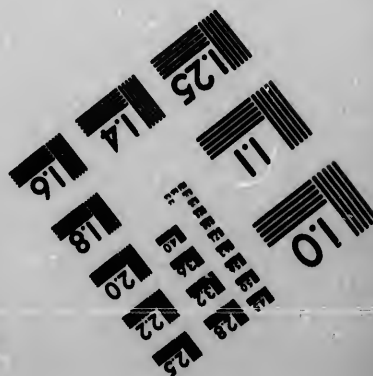
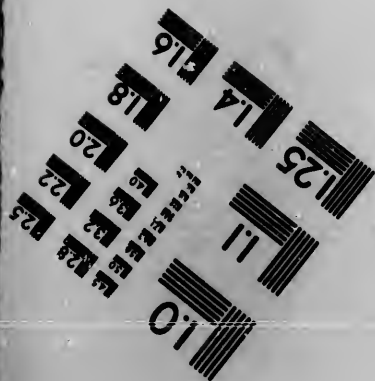
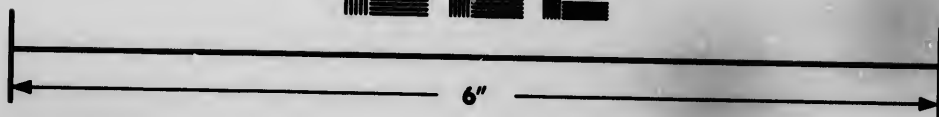
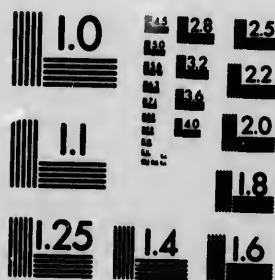


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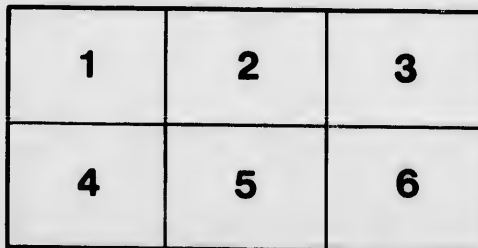
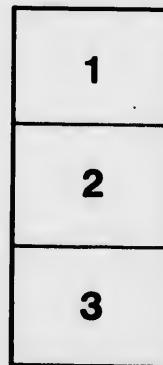
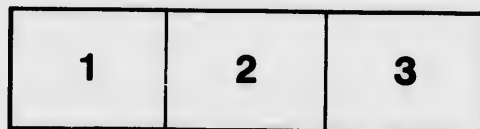
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MY MOTHER-IN-LAW.

CHAPTER I.

BESSIE AND I AND BESSIE'S MOTHER.

"Why, Charlie, you shan't talk so about my mother! I won't allow it."

"It does sound a little rough, my dear, but I can't help it. She does exasperate me so. She doesn't show a proper deference for your husband, my dear. We are married now, and she ought to give up her objections to me. I can't be expected to place myself in her leading strings."

"But you musn't demand too much at once, and should try to conciliate her. Now do, for my sake; won't you dear?"

Here we were, only a month married, and spending our honeymoon at a most charming summer resort, where there was no excuse for getting out of patience. Everything was beautiful and attractive; little hotel, strange to say, quite delightful; no fault to find with surroundings and accommodations; my darling Bessie as sweet as an angel, and determined to be happy and to make me happy; everything, in short, calculated to give us a long summer of delight.

That is, if Bessie had only been an orphan. But there was her mother, who had joined us on our summer trip after the first two weeks of unalloyed happiness, and threatened to accompany us through life. Already it almost made the prospect dismal. The idea that Bessie and I would ever quarrel, or even have any impatient words together, had seemed to me to be simply ridiculous. I had seen what I had seen. My dashing friend Fred and his stylish wife—they had been married two years, and a visible coldness had come upon them. I knew, by an occasional angry whisper and knitting of the brow before people, that he must sometimes swear and rave in the privacy of their own rooms, and her cutting replies or haughty indifference showed that there had been a deal of love lost between them in those two years.

Other people, too, got indifferent or downright hostile in their marital relations. But then, I was not a dashing fellow and Bessie was not stylish, and in other ways we were

quite different from most people. Ours had been a real love-match from the first. Bessie was simple and unaffected, honest and pure in every thought, and determined to make me a faithful and loving wife till death did us part. As for me, why, of course I was generous and affectionate, ready to make any sacrifice and bear any burden for the trusting creature who had so freely given herself into my keeping. There should be no clouds to darken her life. I would never be selfish or impatient, or for one moment hurt her gentle heart by heedless act or careless word.

But plague upon it! I could not get on with her mother; and here I was, before our summer holiday was over, and before we had settled down to that home life in which trouble and annoyance must needs come, getting out of patience and saying cruel things; and there was Bessie, sitting in the summer twilight with a light shawl drawn over her shoulders, pouting her pretty lips with vexation, and digging the toes of her little boots into the balustrade in front of us, because I had expressed a pious wish that her mother was in Jericho. I declare, if there weren't tears gathering in her gentle blue eyes!

I was angry with myself, and, putting my arm around her slender waist, I laid my cheek against hers and said soothingly, "Never mind, darling! I didn't mean it. Don't think any more about it."

But as we sat for the next five minutes without saying a word, I couldn't help pondering on the possibilities of the future, for Mrs. Pinkerton was to live with us. That was one of the understood conditions of our bargain, and it was evident that she was to furnish the test of all my good resolutions.

Mrs. Pinkerton had been left a widow when Bessie was twelve years old, with a neat little cottage in the suburbs of the city and a snug competence in a secure investment. I was fairly settled in business, with an income that would enable us to live in modest comfort, and was determined not to disturb the

investment or have it drawn upon in any way for household expenses. But the old lady—I already began to speak of her by that disrespectful epithet, although she was still under fifty—was to live with us. I had readily acquiesced in that arrangement, for was it not my darling's wish? And I could not decently make any objection, for it was mighty convenient to have a pretty cottage, ready furnished, in one of the finest suburbs of the city in which I was employed.

Mrs. Pinkerton was a good woman in her way; how could she be anything else and the mother of such an angel as I had secured for my wife? She meant well, of course; I admitted that, and I ought to be on the pleasantest terms with her, and determined from the first that I would be. But, somehow, we were not congenial, and when that is the case the best people in the world find it hard to get along agreeably together.

The course of true love between Bessie and me had run very smooth. From the moment my old school-fellow, her brother George, now in Paris studying medicine, had introduced me to her, I had been completely won by her sweet disposition and charming ways, and she in turn was captivated by my manly independence, strong good sense, and generous impulses. I am not vain, but the truth is the truth; and, as I am telling this story myself, I must set down the facts. We fell in love right away, and it was not long before we were mutually convinced that we were made expressly for each other and could never be happy apart.

So it happened that I had to do the courting with the mother. She was the one to be won over, and it was not likely to be an easy task, for I plainly saw that she did not quite approve of me. When I was first introduced to her she looked at me with her great, steady blue eyes, as if analyzing me to the very boots, and evidently set me down as a somewhat arrogant and self-sufficient young fellow, who needed a judicious course of discipline to teach him humility. I was generally self-possessed, and had no little confidence in myself, but I confess that I was embarrassed in her presence. She was not at all like Bessie, I thought. She had taught school in her youth, and had learned to command and be obeyed. The late Mr. Pinkerton, I fancied, had found it useless to contend against her authority, and this had increased her disposition to carry things her own way; and her seven years' widowhood, with its independence and self-reliance, had not prepared her to be submissive to the wishes of others.

Still, she loved her daughter with tender devotion, and her chief anxiety was to have her every wish gratified. Therein was my advantage, for I knew that Bessie, gentle and trusting as she was, would never give me up or allow her life to be happy without the gratification of her first love. So I set to work confidently to make myself agreeable to the widow and win her consent to our marriage.

"You must bring mamma around to approve of it," Bessie had said, on that ever-to-be-remembered evening, when we were returning from a long drive, and after an hour of sweet confidences she had surrendered herself without reserve to my future keeping. "She is the best mother in the world, and loves me very much, but she is peculiar in some ways, and I am afraid she doesn't altogether like you. I would not for the world displease her, that is, if I could help it," she added, glancing up, as much as to say, "It is all settled now forever and forevermore, whatever may befall, but do get my mother to consent to it with a good grace."

CHAPTER II.

COURTING THE MOTHER.

Mrs. Pinkerton sat in an easy-chair near the window, doing nothing, when I marched in to begin the siege. I felt diffident and uneasy, although I am not usually troubled that way. But if I should live to the advanced age of Methuselah, I could never forget Mrs. Pinkerton's appearance, on that memorable occasion. Before I had spoken a word I saw that she knew what was coming, and had hardened her heart against me. She had anticipated all that I would say, and discounted my plea, as it were, and prejudged the whole case. Her look plainly said: "Young man, I know your pitiful story. You needn't tell me. You may be very well as young men go. You fancy you can more than fill a mother's place in Bessie's inexperienced heart, but you can't get me out. I am adamant. Your intentions are all very honorable, but you are a graceless intruder. Your credentials are rejected on sight." I saw the task I had undertaken. "Mrs. Pinkerton," I said, mustering all my forces, "it is no use mincing the matter, or beating about the shrubbery. I am in love with your daughter, and Bessie is in love with me. I believe I can make Bessie happy, and am sure nothing but Bessie can make me happy. I have come to ask your consent to our marriage." Then I hung my head like a whipped school-boy.

Mrs. Pinkerton took off her eye-glasses and then put them on again, with consider-

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able care: after which she levelled a look at
me and through me that made me feel like
calling out "Murder!" or making for the
door. But I stood my ground, and heard
her say quietly—

"So you are engaged to my daughter?"

A simple remark, but the tone meant
"You are a puppy." I had to muster all
my resolution to reply politely and coolly
that, with her gracious consent, such was
the fact.

"Are you aware that it is customary
to obtain parental consent before proceeding
to such lengths?"

"Mrs. Pinkerton, excuse me. I thought
in my ignorance that it would be just as well
to do that afterwards; or rather, I didn't
think anything about it. I was so much in
love with Bessie that it was all out before I
knew it. If I had thought, of course I would
have—"

"Yes, yes," said Mrs. Pinkerton, "if
your kind of people ever thought, they would
undoubtedly do differently. Bessie certainly
ought to know better. Girls rush into mat-
rimony now-a-days with as much carelessness
as they would choose partners at a game of
croquet. I should have been consulted in
this. It is all wrong to allow young people
to have such entire freedom in affairs of this
kind as they are allowed in these days."

"But certainly, my dear Mrs. Pinkerton,"
I said, becoming somewhat impatient, "you
will not refuse your consent in this case?
Bessie's happiness—that is, the happiness of
all of us, or—our happiness—Bessie's and
mine, I would say—"

"No doubt your happiness is very import-
ant to yourself, Mr. Travers, and as to my
daughter's well-being, I have looked to that
for quite a number of years' past, and I flatter
myself I shall be able to look out for it in
the future."

"Not if you insist on parting us!" I cried,
getting out of patience and letting all my
carefully prepared plans of assault go by the
board. "You may withhold your consent,
but that cannot prevent our loving each
other!"

"Of course not. Nothing on earth can
prevent young people who are in love from
making themselves ridiculous. But getting
married and living together soon cures them
of sentimentalism."

"Won't you give us that chance to be
cured then, my dear Mrs. Pinkerton?" I ex-
claimed, regaining a little tact.

She seemed to be taking it under advis-
ement, and my courage came up a little.
Then, looking at me with her peculiarly
searching gaze, she said, "It isn't necessary
to argue the case; I know all you would say.
You love Bessie to distraction; you could

not live without her; your heart would be
hopelessly broken if you had to give her up;
you will be true to her forever and a day;
you offer her all the good things of this world
that any sane woman could desire, besides
which you throw in an eternal, undying de-
votion; and so on, to the end of the chapter.
We will consider all said, and so save time
and trouble. You think that ought to end
the matter and bring me to your way of
thinking. I wonder at the effrontery of
young men, who walk into our households
and carelessly tell us mothers what is best
for our children, and assure us, between their
puffs of tobacco smoke, that a case of three
weeks' moonshining outweighs the devotion
of a lifetime."

I began to see what course was open for
me. The old lady was jealous, and I could
not blame her. Her objections were gen-
eral, not specific. Strategy must take the
place of a direct assault. There flashed
through my mind the ridiculous old non-
sense rhyme quotation—

"I must soften the heart of this terrible old
cow."

I said gently, "I can readily see how a
mother must regard the claims of the man
who comes to her demanding her most pre-
cious treasure; and what you say makes me
feel how presumptuous my demand must
seem. I love your daughter—that must be
my only excuse. And after all, what has
happened was only what a mother must ex-
pect. Your daughter's love will not be the
less yours because she also loves the man of
her choice. That she should love and be
loved was inevitable."

"We will not go into the discussion any
further," she interrupted. "I don't wish
to say anything uncomplimentary to you
personally, but I simply am not prepared
to give my daughter up at present. My
opinion of men in general is good, so long as
they do not interfere with me or mine."

(Mental note: "May there be precious
little interference between us!")

"Your judgment is doubtless good," I
said, smiling; "but there are exceptions
which prove the rule, and I hope you will
find that even I will improve upon acquaint-
ance."

"Your conceit is abominable, young
man."

"Thank you. I have found no one who
could flatter me except myself, so I lose
no opportunity to give myself a good char-
acter."

"Especially in addressing the mother of
the woman you want to marry, eh?"

"Precisely, as she is naturally prejudiced
against me. My dear Mrs. Pinkerton, what
must I do to please you?"

"Hold your tongue!"

"Anything but that. You admit that I am a good fellow enough, and that Bessie would probably marry some one in course of time. Now, I don't see why you cannot make us both happy by giving your consent. It costs you a pang to do it. I honour you for that. Give me the right to console you."

"By making myself the object of charity? No, not yet, not yet. I must, at least, have time to think."

I inwardly cursed my luck. How long was this sort of thing going to last? I was about to rise and take my leave, when an inspiration struck me.

"Mrs. Pinkerton," I said gravely, "what you have said of the ties that exist between you and your daughter has touched me deeply. I believe we young people do not half appreciate a mother's unchanging love. It lies so far beneath the surface that we are too apt to forget its constant blessings. My mother died when I was very young. Ah, if she were only here now, to plead my cause for me!"

With these words, I turned on my heel and hastily got out of the room. I went into the garden and lighted a cigar, the better to think over the situation. I could not determine what progress, if any, I had made in the good graces of Mrs. Pinkerton. While I was cogitating, Bessie came out and approached me with an enquiring look. I am afraid my returning glance did not greatly reassure her. As she came up and took my arm, she said—

"Tell!"

"Well! No, it's not very well. I am beaten, my dear. Your mother is simply a stony-hearted parent!"

"What did she say?"

"Oh, she wants you to grow up an old maid—as if such a thing were possible!—and says that lovers have no idea of what a mean, cruel thing it is to rob people of only daughters; and that she shall require time to think of it. What do you think of that?"

Bessie knitted her pretty brows, and dug her toes into the walk.

"Perhaps I had better go to her?" she said.

"Of course you must. But I know it won't be of any use just yet. We must, as she says, give her time. She will come round all right at the end of nine or ten years. The fact is, Bessie, she's a little bit jealous of me and regards me as an intruder."

"Poor, dear mamma!" said Bessie, her eyes becoming moist.

"Poor, dear pussy-cat! You should have seen her shoot me with her eyes and ridicule my honest sentiments. She used me roughly, my dear, and I can't help wondering at my amazing politeness to her."

Bessie was not discouraged. She had several interviews with her mother, in which protestations, tears, smiles, and coaxings played a part, but there was no apparent change of heart on the part of the old lady, after all. I don't know how long this disagreeable state of affairs would have continued under ordinary circumstances, had not an unexpected, thrilling, and, as it happened, fortunate occurrence hastened a crisis and brought an end to the siege. It was a very singular thing, and it seemed to have been pre-arranged to bring me glory, and, what was better, the desired goodwill of the "stony-hearted parent."

If there was any one thing that the worthy Mrs. Pinkerton detested more than men and tobacco, that thing was a burglar. Add fear to detestation, and you will see that when I defended the old lady from the attentions of a burglar, I had taken a long step into her good graces.

It was a week after the interview narrated above, and in the early summer, Mrs. Pinkerton had gone down to a quiet sea-side resort for a short stay, thinking to get away from me; but I was not to be put off so. I followed her, taking a room at the same hotel.

About one o'clock at night, the particular burglar to whom I owe so much, effected an entrance into the hotel through a basement window, and quietly made his way up stairs. Every one was asleep except myself, and I was planning all sorts of expedients to conquer the prejudices of my mother-in-law that was to be. Mrs. Pinkerton's room opened on a long corridor, near the end of which my modest seven-by-nine snuggerly was situated. It was a warm night, and the transoms over the doors of almost all the bed-chambers had been left open to admit the air. A gleam of light from a dark-lantern, coming through my transom, was what led me to hastily don a pair of trousers and take my revolver from my valise. Then I opened my door very cautiously, without having struck a light, and could see—nothing! I waited a few moments, almost holding my breath. At the end of those few moments I could make out the form of a man swarming over the top of the door of Mrs. Pinkerton's room. His head and shoulders were already inside the room, and I could see his legs wriggle about as he noiselessly wormed his way through the narrow transom. It took me but a brief second of time to glide forward on tiptoe and mount the

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same chair which had been used by the intruder in climbing to the transom. This done, I seized both the wriggling legs simultaneously, and gave a tremendous pull.

My excitement must have imbued me with double my natural strength, and the result of that pull was simply indescribable. Burglar, transom-glass, chair and all, went in a heap on the floor of the corridor, producing the most appalling and unearthly racket conceivable. The whole house was in an uproar in a moment. People seemed to spring up from every square foot of floor in the corridor as if by magic. Cries of "Fire!" "Murder!" "Help!" and screams of frightened women, rose on every hand. The costumes which I beheld on that momentous occasion were not only varied but picturesque as well. The assembled multitude found nothing to interest them, however. I alone was to be seen, seated on a broken chair, with a rapidly swelling black eye, while broken glass and an extinguished lantern lay on the floor. I told the male guests what had happened. The burglar had not waited to ask for my card, but had contented himself with planting one blow from the shoulder on my left eye before I could get upon my legs. And my revolver? Well, I had not the ghost of a chance to use it. It was in my pocket. Fifteen minutes after the fracas, Mrs. Pinkerton came to my room, completely dressed, and insisted upon coming in to hear all about it and to overwhelm me with thanks and admiration. I was as modest as heroes proverbially are, and then and there told her never to refer to the subject again unless she addressed me as Bessie's betrothed.

We went riding together. Bessie, Mrs. Pinkerton, and I, the day after this episode; and without any previous indication of a thaw, that singular old lady began to talk freely about what should be worn at "the wedding," referring to it as though she had been the principal agent in bringing it about.

CHAPTER III.

OUR MARRIAGE.

So it was that I brought my darling's mother around to consent, if not with a very good grace, still with apparent cheerfulness, and she at once took the direction of the nuptial preparations. I made a show of consulting her about many things, but she invariably gave me to understand that her experience and superior knowledge in such matters were not to be gainsaid. I was willing to leave to her all the fuss and frippery of preparing clothes for her daughter. It always seemed to me that she had clothes enough for married life. I couldn't under-

stand why a young woman, on becoming a wife, should need a lot of new and elaborate dresses, such as she had never cared to wear, and an endless variety of under-garments of mysterious and incomprehensible make with frills and fringes and laces and edgings, as if, up to that time, she had never had anything next to her precious person, except what was visible to the exterior world. And even assuming that she donned these things for the first time as parts of a manifold and complicated wedding garment, why should so much fine needle-work and delicate trimming be prepared to be stowed away out of sight of prying mortals, for whose vision women are presumed to dress themselves? Are they got up to show to friends and excite envy, and to fill the minds of other young people with a sense of the difficulties of getting married?

One day, when I happened in—by accident, of course—and the mother happened to be out on one of her many pilgrimages to town, Bessie took me up to her room in a half-frightened way, as if doing something that she was afraid was terribly improper, and showed me a bewildering profusion of these things neatly tucked away in bureau drawers. I laughed outright, and asked her who was to see all that finery. She was vexed, and bit her lip, and I was sorry and voted myself a brute. From that moment I determined not to say a word about the clothes, except to express unstinted admiration.

There was not only clothing, but blankets and quilts and bed linen, which was already well supplied. One would suppose that a large and sudden increase of family was expected at once. These things annoyed me as senseless, and as absorbing so much of my Bessie's attention that we didn't have half the blissful times together that we had before our engagement was an acknowledged thing. But I knew that it was the mother's doings. Bessie did not really have any foolish care for dress, though always beautifully arrayed without any apparent effort; but she supposed it was the proper thing, and submitted to her mother.

But there was one thing I set my heart on. I wanted a quiet wedding, without display or pretence. It did seem to me that this was a private occasion in which the wishes of the persons chiefly concerned should be consulted. It was their business and should be conducted in their own way. Bessie sympathized with me, and wanted of all things to go to church quietly and privately, and then, after a leave-taking with a few intimate friends at home, start right off on our proposed trip to the White Mountains. But no; we were inexperienced, and the

widow knew what the occasion demanded much better than we did. She was a little g and in her ideas, and felt the importance of keeping on good terms with society. I was disposed to apply profane epithets to society, and to insist that this marriage was mine and Bessie's, and nobody's else. But what was the use? There would be unpleasant feelings, and the mamma must be conciliated, and so I yielded after a warm but altogether affectionate little controversy with Bessie.

Every time I came to the house now, I was informed of some new feature which Mrs. P. had decided upon as indispensable to the gorgeousness of the occasion.

"Have you ordered your dress suit yet?" she asked one evening.

"Dress suit? Oh yes. I had almost forgotten that."

"And, by the way, those cards? I think you had better send them out: you write such a good, legible hand."

"Y-e-s, oh yes. With pleasure."

"When you go to the city to-morrow, I wish you would drop in at Draper's and get me a few little things. I have made out a list, so it won't be any trouble to you."

"No trouble at all. Glad to do it."

"That white ribbon should be medium width. And before I forget it, have you written yet to your friend De Forest about his standing up?"

"No, I forgot it. I'll drop him a line to-morrow. But what do you want that ribbon to be so long for?"

"That is to be held across the aisle by the ushers, you know; to keep off the *ignobile vulgus*. You and Bessie will march up here, you see, preceded by the four ushers and the bridesmaids and groomsmen, who will then range themselves off this way. The members of the families and their friends will be separated from the other people *thus*. It's very pretty. Belle Graham was married that way at St. Thomas's, and everybody said it was splendid."

This is the kind of talk I had to listen to for weeks, and is it any wonder that I grew thin and had sleepless nights?

I was now a mere puppet in the hands of Mrs. Pinkerton, and came and went as she pulled the wires. She had arranged that the affair was to take place in "her church"—and a very fashionable temple of worship it was. Her rector was to officiate, assisted by a vealy young man who had just graduated from the theological seminary. There were to be four bridesmaids and an equal number of groomsmen and of ushers. I should have liked to have something to say about who should "stand up" with us, as Mrs. Pinkerton expressed it; but when I

timidly suggested that some of my friends would be available for the purpose, I was taken aback to learn that the entire list had been made up and decided upon without my knowledge, and that only one of the groomsmen chosen was a friend of mine—De Forest—the others being young men whom the worthy Mrs. Pinkerton had selected from her list of society people. One of the young men was a downright fool, if I must call things by their right names, but he dressed to perfection; the remaining two I scarcely knew by sight, but I did know that one of them had seen the time when he aspired to occupy the place I was now filling in respect to the Pinkerton household: need I say more concerning my sentiments regarding him?

The ushers—well, of course they were the four young gentlemen who knew everybody who was anybody, and I could not object to them, considering that they charged nothing for their onerous services.

The bridesmaids were all old school friends of Bessie's, and two of them were considered pretty, and the other two were stylish.

One of my keenest regrets was that Bessie's brother George was away off in Paris, and could not grace the occasion with his superb presence; for he was a superb fellow in all respects, and I felt a true brotherly affection for him. Had he not introduced me to Bessie? Had he not always wanted me to become his brother-in-law?

The great day came at last. The town was full of the invited people, and the weather, so anxiously looked to on such occasions, was all that could be desired. My remembrance of the solemn events of that day is now rather misty. I remember the tussle De Forest and I had with my collar and cravat in the morning, and how he stuck pins into my neck, and wrestled mightily with his own elaborate toilet. I remember, and this very distinctly, how awfully tight were my new patent leather boots, which caused me for the time being the most excruciating anguish. Beyond these, and similar minor things which have a way of sticking in the memory, all the rest is very much like a vivid dream. The close carriage whirling through the streets; a great crush of people, with here and there a familiar, smiling face; Bessie in her wedding-dress of white silk, with her long veil and twining garlands of orange blossoms; the bridesmaids, radiant in tulle, with pretty blue bows and sashes; the long aisle, up which we marched with slow and reverent tread; the pealing measures of the Wedding Chorus; the dignified and fatherly clergyman; the vealy young assistant; the emotion of the slowly intoned words of the marriage service; the fumbling for the ring—and

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through it all there rises, as out of a mist, the face of my mother-in-law, the presiding genius of it all, the unknown quantity in the equation of my married life, now begun amid the felicitations, more or less sincere, of a host of kissing, hand-shaking, sniling, chattering, good-natured aunts, uncles, cousins, and relatives of all degrees.

CHAPTER IV.

MOUNTAINS AND MORE MOTHER-IN-LAW.

So the bells were rung, metaphorically speaking, and we were wed. I had a long leave of absence from the banking-house in which I held a responsible, and confidential position, and we started for the mountains, leaving mamma Pinkerton to put things to rights and follow us in a fortnight, when we had decided to settle down for a month's quiet stay in a picturesque town of the mountain region. Oh, the unrestrained joy of that fortnight! Everybody at the hotels seemed to know by instinct that we were a newly married pair, and knowing glances passed between them. But what did we care? With pride and a conscious embarrassment that made my hand tremble, I wrote on the registers in a bold hand "Charles Travers and wife." I asked for the best room with a pleasant outlook. The smiling clerk, trained to dissimulation, would appear as unconscious as the blank safe behind him, but he knew all the while, the sly rascal, that we were on a wedding trip, and he paid special attention to our comfort. We saw the glories and wonders of the mountains, and shared their inspiration as with a single heart. We rose early to drink the clear air and greet the rising sun together. We strolled out in the evening to romantic spots, and there, with arms around each other, as we walked or stood gazing on the scene and listening to the rustling breeze, we were happy. For two weeks our lives blended with each other and with nature, and it was with a sigh that we mounted the lumbering stage to take up our sojourn in the retired town on the hills. We came to the little hotel just at night, and were stared at and commented upon by those who had been there three days and assumed the air of having had possession for years. We were tired, and kept aloof that evening, and the next day mother-in-law arrived.

As she dismounted from the coach, she gave the driver a severe warning to be careful of her trunk, an iron-bound treasure that would have defied the efforts of the most determined baggage-smasher. Bessie had flown to meet her, and their greeting was most affectionate; but to me the old

lady presented a hand encased in a mit, or sort of glove with amputated fingers, and gave me a stately "I hope you are well, sir," that rather made me feel sick. She looked full at me in her steady and commanding way, as much as to say, "Well, you have committed no atrocious crime yet, I suppose, but I am rather surprised at it."

If there is anything I pride myself on, it is self-possession, and a willingness to face anybody, and give as good as I get, but that magnificently imperious way of looking with those large eyes always disconcerted me. I could not brace myself to meet them with any show of impudence, though the old lady had not ceased to regard that as the chief trait of my character. As Mrs. Pinkerton trod with stately step the rude piazza of that summer hotel, she put her eye-glasses on and surveyed its occupants with a look that made them shrink into themselves and feel ashamed to be sitting about in that idle way. I believe the old lady's eyesight was good enough, and that she used her glasses, with their gold bows and the slender chain with which they were suspended about her neck, for effect. I noticed that if they were not on she always put them on to look at anything, and if they happened to be on she took them off for the same purpose.

"Well," she said, going into the little parlour, and looking from the windows, "this really seems to be a fine situation. The view of the mountain is quite grand."

"Very kind of you to approve of the mountains, but you could give them points on grandeur," I thought; but I merely remarked. "We find it quite pleasant here."

She turned and glanced at me without reply, as much as to say, "Who addressed you, sir? You would do well to speak when you are spoken to." I was abashed, but was determined to do the agreeable so far as I could, in spite of the rebuke of those eyes.

"The house doesn't seem to me to be very attractive," she continued, glancing around with a gaze that took in everything through all the partition walls, and assuming a tone that meant, "I am speaking to you, Bessie, and no one else." "What sort of people are there here?"

"Oh, some very pleasant people, I should judge," said Bessie, "but we have been here only one day, you know, and have made no acquaintances to speak of. Charlie's friend, Fred. Marston, from the city, is here with his wife; and I met a young lady to whom I took quite a fancy this morning, a Miss Van Duzen. She is quite wealthy, and an orphan, and is here with her uncle, a fine-

looking gentleman, who is president of a bank, or an insurance company, or something of the sort. You saw him, I think on the piazza—the large man, with gray side-whiskers, white vest, and heavy gold chain."

"Yes, I noticed him. A pompous-looking old gentleman, isn't he?"

"Oh, he is dignified in his manner, but not at all pompous," was the reply.

"Well, I call him pompous, if looks mean anything," said the mother, with the air of one to whom looks were quite sufficient. "I think I will go to my room," she added, and turned a glance on me, as much as to say, "You needn't come, sir." I had no intention of going, and wandered out on the piazza, feeling as though Bessie had almost been taken away from me again.

When she rejoined me, leaving her mother above stairs, I asked, "What does she think of her room?"

"Well, it doesn't quite suit her. She thinks the furniture scanty and shabby, water scarce, towels rather coarse, and she can't endure the sight of a kerosene lamp, but she will make herself quite comfortable I dare say."

"And everybody else uncomfortable," I felt like adding, but restrained my self.

She came down to tea, and being offered a seat on the other side of me from Bessie, firmly declined it, and took the one on the other side of her daughter from me. As she unfolded her napkin she took in the whole table with a searching glance, and had formed a quick estimate of everybody sitting around it. Miss Clara Van Duzen and Mr. Desmond, her uncle, sat opposite, and an introduction across the table took place. The young lady was vivacious and talkative, and tried to make herself agreeable, but my mother-in-law did not like what she afterwards called her "chatter," and set her down as a frivolous young person. "Miss Van," as everybody called her, with her own approval—for, as she said, she detested the Duzen—which her Dutch ancestors had bequeathed her with their other property—was of New York Knickerbocker origin, now living with her uncle in Boston, and was by no means frivolous, though uncommonly lively. She had fine, brown eyes, beautiful hair, and a complexion that defied sun and wind. It had the rosy glow of health, and indicated a good digestion and high spirits. Mr. Desmond seemed to be mostly white vest, immaculate shirt-front, and gold chain, the last-named article being very heavy and meandering through the button-holes of his vest and up around his invisible neck. He said little, and was evidently not much

given to light conversation. He was very gracious in his attentions to the ladies, however, and seemed to pay special deference to Mrs. Pinkerton. I afterwards learned that he was a widower of long standing, without chick or child, and the guardian of his niece, whom he regarded with great admiration.

Down at the other end of the table was Marston, evidently giving vent to his impatience about something, and his wife, with fierce eyes, telling him, in manner if not in words, not to make a fool of himself. The rest of the company was made up either of transient visitors or of persons with whom this story has nothing in particular to do.

As we emerged on the piazza after tea, Fred, who had impolitely gone out in advance, called out, "Charlie, old boy, come over here and have a smoke."

I must confess that these long sittings on the piazzas of summer hotels had lured me back to my old habits, which I had forsworn in my efforts to conciliate Bessie's mother. Bessie had encouraged me in it, for to tell the truth she rather liked the fragrance of a good cigar, and dearly loved to see me enjoying it. It was my nature to defy the whole world and be master of my own habits, but I had felt a mean inclination, after mother-in-law joined the party, to slink away and smoke on the sly. There was nothing for it now, however, but to put on a bold face, or play the hypocrite and pretend I didn't smoke. The latter I would not do, and if I had attempted it, it wouldn't go down with Fred, and I should have been in a worse predicament than ever. I went boldly across the piazza and took the proffered cigar. Glancing out at the corner of my eye as I was lighting it, I saw my mother-in-law regarding me through her glasses with increased disfavour. She did not, however, seem to be surprised, and doubtless believed me capable of any perfidy.

"I say, Charlie, old boy, let's have a game of billiards," said Fred, after a few puffs. "I'll give you twenty points and beat you out of your boots." Now I was very fond of billiards, and usually didn't care who knew it, but Mrs. Pinkerton did not approve of the game, and had no knowledge that I indulged in it. But Fred would speak in that absurd shouting way of his, and all the ladies heard him. Again I mustered up resolution and went into the billiard room, but I played very indifferently, and was thinking all the time of my mother-in-law and her opinion of me. I really wanted to get into her good graces, but it required the sacrifice of all my own inclinations, and I despised a man who deliberately played the hypocrite to win anybody's favour.

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"After two or three listless games I said to Fred, "I guess I will join the ladies." I was feeling some qualms of conscience for staying away from Bessie a whole hour at once.

"Oh, hang the ladies!" was Fred's graceless response; "they can take care of themselves. My wife gets along well enough without me I know, and yours will soon learn to be quite comfortable without your guardian presence; besides she's got her mother now. By the way, what a mighty grand old dowager Mrs. Pink is!"

"Pinkerton is her name," I said, a little haughtily, as if resenting the liberty he took with my mother-in-law's cognomen.

"Oh, yes, I know, but the name is too long; and besides, she reminds one of a full-blown pink, a little on the fade, perhaps, but still with a good deal of bloom about her. Is she going to live with you? Precious fine time you will have!" he added, having received his answer by a nod. "She'll boss the shebang, you bet!"

"Oh, I guess not," I answered, not liking his slangy way of talking about my affairs, and resolving in my own mind that I would be master in my own house.

"Well, then, there'll be a fine old tussle for supremacy, and don't you forget it!"

With this remark Fred wandered off down the dusty road, humming Madame Angot, and I drew up a chair by Bessie's side. She had evidently been wishing I would come. Mr. Desmond was sitting a little apart from the rest, twisting his fingers in his watch-chain and looking intently at the mountaintop opposite, as if expecting somebody to come over with a despatch for him. Mrs. Pinkerton sat by her daughter's side in calm grandeur, her gray puffs—that fine silver-gray that comes prematurely on aristocratic brows—seeming like appendages of a queenly diadem. Miss Van had been diverting the company with a lively account of her day's adventures. She was always having adventures, and had a faculty of relating them that was little short of genius.

"Well, my dear, are you having a good time?" I murmured in Bessie's ear.

"Oh, yes; but I was feeling a little lonesome without you."

The conversation degenerated into common-place about the scenery and points of interest in the neighbourhood, and after a while the company dispersed with polite good-evenings.

When we reached our room, I remarked to Bessie, who seemed more quiet than usual, "I hope your mother will like it here."

"Oh, yes, I guess she will like it when she has been here a little while," was the answer. "You know she has not been

away from home much, of late years, except to the seaside with the Watsons and other of her old friends, and she does not adapt herself readily to stranger company."

I said nothing more, but was absorbed in thought about my mother-in-law. It is evident by this time that she was no ordinary woman, no coarse or waspish mother-in-law, but a woman of good breeding and the highest character. She was intelligent and well-informed, a consistent member of the Episcopal Church, with the highest views of propriety and a reverential regard for the rules of conduct laid down by good society. This made her all the harder to deal with. If she were a common or vulgar sort of mother-in-law, I

could assert my prerogatives without compunction; and I was forced to admit that she was a very worthy woman, and not given to petty meddling, but I felt that her presence was an awful restraint. Without her we could have such good times, going and coming as we pleased, and acting with entire freedom; but she must be counted in, and was a factor that materially affected the result. She could not be ignored; her opinions could not be disregarded. That would be rude, and besides, their influence would make itself felt. Strange, the irresistible effect of a presence upon one! She might not openly interfere or directly oppose, but there she was, and she didn't approve of me or like my friends, could not fall in with my ways or my wishes, and make one's company in which I should feel at ease, and I knew that her presence would be depressing, and spoil our summer's pleasure; and after that was over and we were at home, what? Well, sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof. We slept the sound sleep that mountain and country quiet brings, and took the chances of the future.

CHAPTER V.

THE RISE AND FALL.

During the next week of our stay at the Fairview hotel, it grew rather dull. There was little to do but drive on the long country roads, or wander over the hills and in the fields and woods. I could have found plenty of pleasure in that with Bessie and a party of congenial friends, but it didn't seem to be right always to leave my worthy mother-in-law behind, with her crochet work or the last new novel from the city, on the sunny piazza or in her dim little chamber. She was not averse to drives, in fact enjoyed them very much, but she seemed to divine that I did not really want her company; though I protested as became a dutiful son-in-law, that I should be very glad to take

her at any time. She did go with us once or twice, but the laughter and romping behaviour which gave our rides their chief zest were extinguished, and we jogged along in the most proper manner, professing admiration for the outlines of the hills and the far-away stretches of scenery between the more distant mountains. We returned as quiet and demure as if we had been to a funeral. Mrs. Pinkerton saw the effect, and with her fine feeling of independence, she politely but firmly declined to go afterwards. As for walking on anything but level sidewalks or gravel-paths, she could not think of such a thing. The idea of her climbing a hill or getting herself over a fence seemed ridiculous to anybody that knew her.

So it was that we were continually forced to leave her behind, or deny ourselves the chief recreation of the country. I was sincerely disinclined to slight her in any way, and desirous of contributing to her pleasure? A fellow can't get an iceberg to enjoy tropical sunshine. Our dislike to leave the old lady alone, although she insisted that she didn't mind it at all, led us to pass a large portion of each day, sometimes all day, about the house. "It was 'gleuced stupid,'" to use Marston's elegant phrase, but there was little to do for it. To be sure, there was Desmond, "old Dive," Fred called him. He seldom went out of sight of the house, but he had a perfect mail-bag of newspapers and letters every morning, and spent the forenoon indoors, holding sweet communion with them and answering his correspondents. In the afternoon he sat on the piazza by the hour, contemplating the mountain-top that had such a fascination for him. He had a prodigious amount of information on all manner of subjects, and a quick and accurate judgment: but he was generally very reticent, as he tipped back in his chair and twisted his fingers in and out of that gold chain. My mother-in-law, from her shady nook of the piazza, would glance at him occasionally from her work or her book, as much as to say, "It is strange people can't make some effort to be agreeable, instead of being so stiff and dignified all the afternoon"; but he seemed unconscious of her looks and her mental comments. His thoughts were probably in the marts of trade.

Fred was continually going off to distant towns, or down to the great hotels in the mountains, for livelier diversion. His wife often insisted on going with him, to his evident disgust, not because she cared to be in his company, but because she wanted to go to the same places and could not well go alone. Now, Fred wasn't a bad fellow at heart. I had known him for years, and used to like him exceed-

ingly. But he was left without a father at an early age, with a considerable fortune, and his mother was indulgent and not over-wise. He got rather fast as he grew up, and then he contracted a thoughtless marriage with Lizzie Carleton, a handsome and stylish young lady, fond of dress and gay society, and without a notion of domestic responsibility or duty. Like most women who are not positively bad, she had in her heart a desire to be right, but she didn't know how. She was all impulse, and gave way to whims and feelings, as if helpless in any effort to manage her own waywardness. As a natural consequence there were constant jars between the pair. Fred took to his clubs and mingled with men of the race-course and the billiard halls, and Lizzie beguiled herself as best she could with her fashionable friends.

And where was Miss Van Duzen these long and tedious days? They were never tedious to her, for she was always on the go. She would go off alone on interminable strolls, and bring back loads of flowers and strange plants, and she could tell all about them too. Her knowledge of botany was wonderful, and she could make very clever sketches; she would sit by the hour on some lonely rock, putting picturesque scenery on paper, just for love of it; for when the pictures were done she would give them away or throw them away without the least compunction. She had a fine sense of the ludicrous, and was all the time seeing funny things, which she described in a manner quite inimitable. She had grown up in New York, before her father's death, in the most select of Knickerbocker circles, but there was not a trace of aristocracy in her ways. She was sociable with the ostler and the office-boy, and agreeable to the neighbouring farmers, talking with them with a spirit that quite delighted them. And yet there was nothing free and easy in her ways that encouraged undue familiarity. It was merely natural ease and good nature. She inspired respect in everybody but my mother-in-law, who was puzzled with her conduct, so different from her own ideas of propriety, and yet so free from real vulgarity. Mrs. Pinkerton could by no means approve of her, and yet she could accuse her of no offence which the most rigid could seriously censure.

Miss Van was the life of the company when she was about, telling of her adventures, getting up impromptu amusements in the parlour, and planning excursions. She was the only person in the world, probably, who was quite familiar with Mr. Desmond, and she would sit on his knee, pull his whiskers, and call him an "awful glum old fogey," whereat he would laugh and say she had gayety enough for them both. He ad-

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All this while I was trying to win the gracious favour of my mother-in-law, but it was up-hill work. She would answer me with severe politeness, and volunteer an occasional remark intended to be pleasant, but the moment I seemed to be gaining headway, a turn at billiards with Marston, for whom she had a great aversion, a thoughtless expression with a flavour of profanity in it, or my cigars, which I now indulged in without restraint, brought back her freezing air of disapproval.

"Oh, dear!" I yawned sometimes, "why can't I go ahead and enjoy myself without minding that very respectable and severe old woman?" But I couldn't do it. I was always feeling the influence of those eyes, and even of her thoughts. I couldn't get away from it. Sunday came, and Mrs. Pinkerton expressed the hope that we were to attend divine service together. I hadn't thought of it till that moment, and then it struck me as a terrible bore. There was no church within ten miles except a little white, meek edifice in the neighbouring village, occupied alternately by Methodist and Baptist exponents of a very Calvinistic, and to me, a very unattractive sort of religion. It was not altogether to my mother-in-law's liking, but she regarded any church as far better than none.

"I presume you will go, sir," she said, addressing me when I made no reply to the previous hint. She always used "sir," with a peculiar emphasis, when any suggestion was intended to have the force of a command.

"Well, really, I had not thought about it," I said, rather vexed, as I secretly made up my mind, reckless of my policy of conciliation, that I would not go at any price. A tedious, droning sermon of an hour and perhaps an hour and a half in a country church, full of dismal doctrines—the sermon, not the church—I couldn't stand, I thought.

Mrs. Pinkerton's eyes were upon me, waiting for a more definite answer. "I—well, no, I don't think I really feel like it this morning," I thought I would read to Bessie quietly in our room, and take a rest.

"Very well, sir," she said, "Bessie and I will walk down to the village."

"The deuce you will!" I thought; "walk a mile and a half on a dusty road; to be bored!" I knew it was useless to protest, and I was too wilful to take back what I had said, have the team harnessed, and go, like a good fellow, to church. "No, I'll be blighted if I do!" I muttered.

So off went the widow and her daughter without me. Bessie tripped around to me

on the piazza, looking like a fairy in her white dress and a bit of blue ribbon, gave me a sweet kiss, and said, "I'll be back before dinner. Have a nice quiet time, now."

"Oh, yes; have a nice quiet time, and you gone off with that old dragon!" It was a wicked thought, for she was not a bit of a dragon, but the feeling came over me that I was going to feel miserable all the forenoon, and so I did. Miss Van and her uncle had gone early to the neighbouring town, the largest in the county, for church and the opportunity of observing; Fred and his wife had gone, the night before, round to the other side of the mountains, where there was to be a sort of ball or hop at the leading hotel; and the rest of the people in the house might as well have been in the moon, for all that I cared about them. A nice quiet time! Oh, yes; lounging about and trying to think of something besides Mrs. Pinkerton and my own shabby behaviour. I would ten times rather have been in the dullest country church that ever echoed to the voice of the old and unimproved theology of Calvin's day. But I was in for it, and lay in the hammock and looked through the stables, tried to read, tried to sleep, started on a walk and came back, and almost cursed the quiet country Sunday as specially calculated to make a man of sense feel wretched.

At last Bessie and her mother returned, and we had dinner. In the afternoon I was an outcast from Mrs. Pinkerton's favour, but I had Bessie and read to her, and, on the whole, got through the rest of the day comfortably.

The week following I began to feel that this was getting tiresome. Under other circumstances it might be very pleasant, but really I began to doubt whether I was enjoying it. But I made up my mind that during these days of leisure I ought to be making progress in the favour of my mother-in-law, with whom I was destined to live, nobody could say how many years. I couldn't and wouldn't make a martyr or a hypocrite of myself. I wouldn't conceal my actions or deny myself freedom. So I smoked with Fred, played billiards, rolled ten-pins with Fred's wife and Miss Van, and even beguiled Bessie into that vigorous and healthful exercise, which brought a gentle reprimand from her mother, addressed to her but directed at me. She did not think that kind of amusement becoming to ladies who had a proper respect for themselves.

"Why, mamma, Miss Van Duzen plays, and says she thinks it jolly fun," said Bessie, innocently.

"That doesn't alter the case in the least," was the rejoinder. "Miss Van Duzen can judge for herself. I don't think it proper. Besides, your husband's familiar way with those ladies—one of whom is married and no better than she ought to be, if appearances mean anything—does not please me at all."

"O, mamma, how absurd! I see no harm in it at all, and poor Lizzie, I am sure, never means any harm."

"Well, well, my dear, I don't wish to say anything about other people, and I only hope you will never have occasion to see any harm in your husband's evident preference for the company of people with loose notions about proper and becoming behaviour."

On Saturday of that week a little incident occurred that raised me perceptibly in Mrs. Pinkerton's estimation. The great, lumbering stage-coach came up just at evening, more heavily laden than usual, and top-heavy with trunks piled up on the roof. The driver dashed along with his customary recklessness, the six horses breaking into a canter as they turned to come up the rather steep acclivity to the house. The coach was drawn about a foot from its usual rut, one of the wheels struck a projecting stone, and over went the huge vehicle, passengers, trunks, and all. The driver took a terrible leap and was stunned. The horses stopped and looked calmly around on the havoc. There was great consternation in and about the house. Here my natural self-possession came into full play. I took command of the situation at once, directed prompt and vigorous efforts to the extrication of the passengers, had the injured ones taken into the house, applied proper restoratives, and in a few minutes ascertained that only one was seriously hurt. She was a young girl, who had insisted on riding outside, higher up even than the driver. She had been thrown headlong, striking, fortunately, on the grass, but terribly bruising one side of her face and dislocating her left shoulder. In a trice I had made her as comfortable as possible; dashed down to the village for the nearest doctor, having had the forethought to order a team harnessed in anticipation of such a necessity; and, having started the doctor up in a hurry, kept on to the neighbouring county town for a surgeon who had considerable local reputation. I had him on the ground in a surprisingly short time, and before bedtime the unfortunate girl was put in the way of recovery, having received no internal injury.

My behaviour in this affair, as I said, gave me a lift in my mother-in-law's estimation, and of course filled Bessie with the most unbounded admiration, though I had never thought of the moral effect of my action.

In the morning I determined to follow up my advantage. It was Sunday again, and I bespoke the team early, to go to the neighbouring town, where there was an Episcopal church, and where, for that day, a distinguished divine from the city, who was spending his vacation in those parts, was to hold forth. When I had announced my preparation for the religious observance of the day, I actually received what was almost a smile of approval from my mother-in-law. I enjoyed the ride, and was not greatly bored by the service, for I was thinking of something else most of the time, or amusing my mind with the native congregation. We got back late to dinner, and the rest had left the dining-room. The ladies went in without removing their bonnets, and after dinner retired to their rooms.

As I came out on the piazza, Fred, who was walking about in a restless way, puffing his cigar with a sort of ferocity, as though determined to put it through as speedily as possible, shouted, "Hello! Charlie, old boy, where the eternal furies have you been? Here I have been about this dead, sleepy, stupid place all the morning, with nothing to do and nobody to speak to!"

"Why, where's Mrs. M.?"

"Lib? Oh, she's been here, but then she was reading a ghastly stupid novel, and wasn't company; and she went off to the big boarding-house down the road half a mile, to dine with a friend. I wouldn't go to the blasted place, and really think she didn't want me to. But where in thunder were you all the while?"

"At church, to be sure, with my wife and her mother."

"Oh, yes!" was the reply, peculiarly prolonged, as if the idea never occurred to him before. "How long since you became so pious, old man? Didn't suppose you knew what the inside of a church was used for. The outside is mainly useful to put a clock on, where it can be seen. Old Pink—beg pardon! Mrs. Pinkerton—I suppose, dragged you along by main force."

"Not at all. I went of my own motion; in fact, suggested it to the ladies."

"You don't say so! Well, I see she is bringing you round. It is she that is destined to gain the supremacy."

"Pshaw! Is my going to church such an indication of submission? It wouldn't do you any harm to go to church once in a while, Fred."

"Well, I don't know about that," he said, taking out his cigar, and stretching his feet to the top of the balustrade; "I don't know about that. I am afraid it might be the ruin of me. I might become awfully

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man of rags I should become. I tell you,
Charlie, my boy, there's many a good fellow
spoil't by too much church and Sunday
School."

"Perhaps," I replied, "but you and I are
beyond danger."

"Well, yes, but you can't be too careful
of yourself, you know."

There was no answering that, and we re-
lapsed into commonplace, and finished our
cigars.

"Where's old Dives to-day, and his
charming niece, the lively Van?" asked Fred,
after an uncommon fit of silent contempla-
tion.

"They went over to some town thirty or
forty miles away, yesterday, and haven't got
back," I replied.

"I tell you, that girl knows how to cir-
cumvent these stupid Sundays, don't she,
though? And she takes old Dives along
wherever she wants to go. I believe she
would take him where the other Dives
went, if she was disposed to take
a trip there herself. But, holy Jerusa-
lem! what are we to do to get through the
rest of the day! No company, no billiards,
no fishing. Confound the prejudices of so-
ciety. I tell you, it is just such women as
that mother-in-law of yours that keep so-
ciety intimidated, as it were, into artificial
proprieties. Now where's the harm of a
pleasant game on a Sunday, more than sit-
ting here and grumbling and cursing because
there's nothing to do?"

"I made no reply, and Fred lighted an-
other cigar. He was evidently thinking of
something. "Look here, old fellow," he
said at length in an undertone, something
very unusual with him, "come up to my
room. You haven't seen it. Lib won't be
back till tea-time, and perhaps we can find
something to amuse ourselves."

He led the way and I followed, thinking
no harm. His room was up stairs and on
the back of the house, looking up the great
hall that stretched back to the clouds. As
we entered, I found he had brought a good
many things with him, and given the room
much the air of the quarters of a bachelor in
the city. His sleeping-room was separate
from that, and formed a sort of boudoir for
his wife. He motioned me to an easy-chair,
set a box of fine cigars on the table, and go-
ing to the closet brought out a decanter of
sherry and some glasses.

"In these cursed places, you can get
nothing to drink," he said, "unless on the
sly, and I hate that; so I bring along my
own beverages, you see."

I saw and tasted, and found it very good.
He was still fumbling about the closet, with

profane ejaculations, and finally emerged
with something in his hand that I at first
took for a small book. But he unblushingly
put on the table that pasteboard volume
sometimes called the Devil's Bible. "Come,"
he said, "where's the harm? Let us have
a quiet game of Casino or California Jack, or
something else. It is better than perishing
of stupidity."

I demurred. I was not over-scrupulous,
but I had sufficient of my early breeding
left to have a qualm of conscience at the
thought of playing cards on Sunday.

"Oh, nonsense!" said Fred, carelessly, as
he proceeded to deal the cards for Casino.
"There, you have an ace and little Casino-
right before you. Go ahead, old man!"

I made a feeble show of protesting, but
took up my cards, and, finding that I could
capture the ace and little Casino, took them.
From that the play went on; I became quite
absorbed, and dismissed my scruples, when,
as the sun was getting low, a shadow pass-
ed the window.

"Great Jupiter!" I exclaimed, looking
up. "Does that second-story piazza go all
the way round here?"

"To be sure," answered Fred, whose back
was to the window. "Why not? What
did you see—a spook?"

"My mother-in-law!"

"The devil!"

"No, Mrs. Pinkerton!"

"Well, what do you care? You are your
own boss, I hope."

"Yes, of course; but she will be terri-
bly offended, and I think it would be pleas-
anter for all concerned to keep in her good
graces."

"Gammon! Assert your rights, be mas-
ter of yourself, and teach the old woman
her place. D—me if I would have a
mother-in-law riding over me, or prying
around to see what I was about!"

"Oh, I am sure she passed the window
by accident. She would never pry around;
it isn't her style; she has a fine sense of
propriety, has my mother-in-law!"

"Oh, yes, old Pink is the pink of propri-
ety, no doubt about that!" said the rascal,
laughing heartily at his heartless pun.

But I couldn't laugh. I saw plainly
enough that I had lost more than all the
ground that I had gained in my mother-in-
law's favour, and my task would be harder
than ever. I had no more desire to play
cards, and sauntered down stairs and out of
doors as if nothing had happened. At the
tea-table Mrs. Pinkerton was very impressive
in her manner, but showed no direct con-
sciousness of anything new. On the piazza,
after tea, she was uncommonly affable to her
daughter, and, I thought, a little disposed

to keep Bessie from talking to me. The latter appeared troubled somewhat, and looked at me in an anxious way, as if longing to rush into my arms and ask me all about it and say how willingly she forgave me; but her mother kept her within the circle of her influence, and I set apart, harbouring unutterable thoughts and saying nothing. At last Mr. Pinkerton arose, and said sweetly, "I wouldn't stay out any later, dear, it is rather damp."

"Stay with me, Bessie," I said, "I want to speak to you. Your mother is at liberty to go in whenever she pleases." It was then she gave me a disdainful look and swept in, and I muttered the wish regarding her transportation to a distant clime, which brought out the gentle rebuke with which the story opens.

I saw no prospect of enjoying a longer stay at the Fairview, unless some burglary or terrible accident should occur to give me chance for a new display of my heroic qualities, and even then, I thought, it would be of no use, for I should spoil it all next day. So we determined to go home a week earlier than we had intended. The Marstons were going to Canada and Lake George, and wouldn't reach home till October. Mr. Desmond and his niece stayed a month longer where they were, and that would bring them home about the same time. Bessie and I went home with a lack of that buoyant bliss with which we had travelled to the mountains and spent those first two weeks. There was no change in us, but it was all due to my mother-in-law.

CHAPTER VI.

WHAT IS HOME WITHOUT A MOTHER-IN-LAW?

Home! We were back from the mountains, and our brief wedding-journey had become a thing of the past. Mrs. Pinkerton's iron-bound trunk had been reluctantly deposited in her bed-chamber by a puffing and surly hack-driver; and here was I, installed in the little cottage as head of the household, for weal or for woe. It was Mrs. Pinkerton's cottage, to be sure, but I entered it with the determination not to live there as a boarder or as a guest subject to the proprietor's condescending hospitality. I was able and not unwilling to establish a home of my own, and inasmuch as I refrained from doing so because of Mrs. Pinkerton's desire to keep her daughter with her, I had the right to consider myself under no obligation to my mother-in-law.

The cottage was far from being a disagreeable place in itself. It was small, but extremely neat and pleasant. The rooms were furnished with a degree of quiet taste that

defied criticism. The land of an accomplished housekeeper was everywhere made manifest, and everything had an air of refinement and comfort. There was no ostentatious furniture; the chairs were made to sit in, but not to put one's boots on. The cleanliness of the house was terrible. One could see that no man had lived there since the death of the late Pinkerton.

Our room was the same that had been occupied by Bessie since she was a school-girl in short frocks. It was full of Bessie's "things," and it was lucky that my effects occupied but very little space.

"This is jolly," I said, as I sat down on the edge of the bed and pulled a cigar from my pocket. "How soon will supper be ready, I wonder?"

There was no response. Bessie was unpacking—and such an unpacking!

I lighted my cigar and threw myself back on the bed, wondering how they had got on without me at the bank. Presently I came mother-in-law to lend a hand at the unpacking. She did not see me at first, but the fragrance of my Manilla soon reached her nostrils, and she turned.

Such a look as she cast upon me! It almost took my breath away. But she did not say a word. "The subject is beyond her powers of speech," I said to myself. "Let us hope it will be so as a general thing."

However, it made me feel uncomfortable, so by and by I got off the bed—and went down stairs.

At the supper-table I tried to make myself as agreeable as possible. I talked over the trip, and spoke of the people we had met at the mountains; but I had most of the conversation to myself. Bessie did not seem to be in a mood to chat; Mrs. Pinkerton devoted herself to impaling me with her eyes once in a while; in a word, the mental atmosphere was muggy.

"Diamond has travelled a great deal," I said. "I was speaking of French politics the other day, and he gave me a long harangue on the situation. He was in Paris several years, when he was a good deal younger than he is now."

"Mr. Desmond is not a very old man," said Mrs. Pinkerton, "but he is past that age when men think they know all there is to be known."

I accepted this shot good-naturedly, and laughed.

"His niece is a remarkably bright girl," I continued. "Don't you think so?"

"I cannot say I think it either bright or proper for a young lady to go off alone on mountain excursions for half a day, and re-

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"Well, it was imprudent, but you know
she said she had no intention of going so far
when she started, and she missed her way."

"I did not hear her excuse. She ap-
peared to be a spoiled child, and her man-
ners were insufferably offensive. I should
have known she came from New York, even
if I had not been told."

"Do you think all New Yorkers are
loud?"

"I said no such thing. There is a class of
New York young people who are so 'loud'
that respectable people cannot have anything
to do with them without lowering them-
selves. Miss Van Dusen belongs to that
class."

"You are rough on her, upon my word.
I don't think she's half so bad, do you,
Bessie?"

"I liked her very much," said Bessie.
"She may not be our style exactly, but I
think at heart she is a good, true girl."

"I wonder if she will call," I said.
"By the way, Fred Marston is coming out
to see us as soon as he gets back to the
city."

"As to that young man," Mrs. Pinkerton
remarked, with some show of vivacity, "he
impressed me as being little less than dis-
reputable."

"Disreputable! I would have you under-
stand that Fred Marston is one of my
friends," I exclaimed, growing angry, "and
he is as respectable as the rector of St.
Thomas's Church!"

Phew! Now I had done it. Mrs. Pink-
erton was thoroughly scandalized and of-
fended. She got up, and we left the table.
Bessie, looking troubled. I went into the
library, and after lighting a cigar, sat down
to read the papers. Bessie, who had fol-
lowed me, brushed the journal out of my
hand and seated herself on my knee.

"Charlie," she said, kissing me and
smoothing the hair away from my brow,
"can't you and mamma ever get along any
better than this?"

"A conundrum! I never guessed on; so
I shall have to give this up. But don't you
see how it is, dearest? I try to be good to
her, and she won't meet me half-way. On
the contrary, she tries to nag me, I think. It
wasn't my fault to-night. What right has
she to run down my friends? If she don't
like them, she might leave them alone, and
be precious sure they'd leave her alone.
She don't like smoking; I tried to swear off,
tried mighty hard, but it was no use. You
see."

"It wasn't quite necessary for you to
make that remark about the Rev. Dr. Mc-

Canon, was it, Charlie?"

"Well, no; I'm sorry, but she provoked
me to it. I'll apologise."

"And then, Charlie, you will try to
be a little more patient with mamma, won't
you?"

"Yes, I do try, but the trouble is that
she don't like me. Must I keep my mouth
shut, throw away my cigars, bounce all my
friends, and sit up with my arms folded?"

"Oh, no, dear. Be good to her, and be
patient; it will all come around right in
time."

That was Bessie's way of lightening pre-
scent troubles—"It will all come around
right in time." Blessed hope! "Mamma
never is, but always to be blest."

My duties now kept me at the bank nearly
all day, and for a few weeks affairs went
on at home very smoothly. At table Mrs.
Pinkerton maintained a sphinx-like silence,
and I directed my conversation to Bessie.
When the old lady opened her mouth, it was
to snub me. The snub direct, the snub in-
direct, the snub implied, and the snub far-
fetched—I submitted to all with a cheerful
spirit, and not a hasty retort escaped me.

At Bessie's request, I now smoked only in
the library, or in our own room. I bought a
highly ornamental Japanese affair, of curious
workmanship, as a receptacle for cigar-
ashes. Altogether, I behaved like a good
boy.

One evening Marston dropped in. When
his card was brought up stairs, I handed it
over to Bessie, and hurried to the library.

"How are you, old man?" he said, or
rather shouted. "How do you like it, as
far as you've got?"

"Tip-top. I'm glad to see you. When
did you get back?"

"Last Saturday, and mighty glad to get
back to a live place, too. Smoke?"

"Thank you. Bessie will be down in a
minute."

"How's old Pink?"
"S-a-h! She's all right. Don't speak so
confoundedly loud."

"Ha, ha? I see how it is. By-and-bye
you won't dare say your soul's your own. I
pity you, Charlie, upon my word I do. Ned
Tupney was married a few days ago, did you
know it? and he's got a devil of a mother-
in-law on his hands, a regular roarer—"

"Here comes my wife," I broke in. "For
Heaven's sake, change the subject. Talk
about roses!"

Bessie entered and exchanged a friendly
greeting with Fred.

"I was telling Charlie about some won-
derful roses I saw at Mr. Marston's green-house,"
said the unabashed visitor, and he forthwith
laid aside his cigar—on the tablecloth!—and

launched into a glowing description of the imaginary flowers."

Before he had finished, Mrs. Pinkerton entered, much to my surprise. She bowed in a stately manner, inquired formally as to the state of Fred's health, and as she took a seat, I saw her glance take in that cigar.

Fred could talk exceedingly well when he was so disposed, and he entertained us excellently, I thought. He had seen a good deal of the world, was a close observer, and had the faculty of chatting in a fascinating way about subjects that would usually be called commonplace. He was pleased with the aspect of the cottage, and complimented it gracefully.

"Love in a cottage," he sighed, casting a quick glance around the room, "well, it isn't so bad after all, with plenty of books, a pleasant garden, sunny rooms, a pretty view, and a mother-in-law to look after a fellow and keep him straight." And the wretch looked at Mrs. Pinkerton, and laughed in a sociable way.

I promptly called his attention to a beautiful edition of Thackeray's works in the bookcase, a recent purchase.

In the course of a half-hour's call, Fred managed to introduce the dangerous topic at least a half-dozen times, and each time I was compelled to choke him off by ramming some other subject down his throat willy-nilly.

Finally he rose to go. I accompanied him to the front door.

"Sociable creature, old Pink, eh?" he said. "Doesn't love me too well. Is she always as festive and amusing as to-night?"

"Hold on a minute," was my reply. I ran back and got my hat and cane, and accompanied him toward the railway station.

"See here, Fred," I said, "Your intentions are good, but I wish you would quit talking about Mrs. Pinkerton. I am doing my best to live peaceably and comfortably in the same house with her, and you don't help me a bit with your gabble. She is a very worthy woman, and not half so stupid as you imagine. I admit that we don't get along together quite as I could wish, but I'm trying to please my wife by being as good a son as I can be to her mother. What's the use of trying to rile up our little puddle?"

"Oh, all right!" he rejoined. "If you prefer your puddle should be stagnant—admirable metaphor, by the way—it shall be as you wish. Only I hate to see the way things are going with you, and I'm bound to tell you so. You are losing your spirit, tying your hands, and throwing all your manly independence to the winds. If you live two years with that irreproachable mummy, you won't be worth knowing. Do

you dare go into town with "me and have a game of billiards?"

I went. We had several games. I got home about midnight. The next morning at the breakfast table, Mrs. Pinkerton said dryly—

"Your friend Marston pities you, doesn't he?"

"I don't know; if he does, he wastes his emotions," I replied.

"I am glad you think so. He takes a good deal of interest in your welfare, and I suppose he could be prevailed upon to give you wise advice in case of need."

"I dare say. Fred is a good fellow, and advice is as cheap as dirt."

"And pity?"

"Pity! Why do you think Fred pities me? Why should he pity me?"

"Your question is hypocritical, because you know very well that he thinks you are a victim—a victim of a terrible mother-in-law."

It was the first time she had ever spoken out so openly. I said—

"We will leave it to Bessie. Bessie, do I look like a victim?"

"No," said Bessie, "but you are both the queerest puzzles! Mamma is always her dearest self when you are away, Charlie. You don't know each other at all yet. When you are together you are both horrid, and when you are apart you are both lovely. And yet I don't know why it should be so; there is no quarrel between you—and—and—"

And Bessie began to cry. I got up.

"No, there's no quarrel between us," I said; "but perhaps a straight-out row would be better than forever to be eating our own vitals with suppressed rancour."

Mrs. Pinkerton made as if she would go around to where Bessie sat, to condole with her, without noticing my remark.

"No, don't trouble yourself," I cried. "It's my place to comfort my wife." And I took Bessie in my arms tenderly, and kissed her tear-stained cheek almost fiercely.

This theatrical demonstration caused my mother-in-law to sweep out of the room promptly, with her temper as nearly ruffled as I had ever seen it.

"O Charlie!" whimpered my poor little wife despairingly, "what shall I do? It's awful to have you and mamma this way!"

And now it was my turn to say, "Cheer up, my love! It will all come round right in time."

By my *arriere pensee* was, "Would that that burglar had bagged the old iceberg, and carried her off to her native Nova Zembla!"

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CHAPTER VII.

MRS. VAN'S PARTY AND ANOTHER UNPLEASANT-NESS.

One day in the early fall, Mrs. Pinkerton received a letter postmarked at Paris, which seemed to throw her into a state of extraordinary excitement. I knew her well enough to be certain that she would not tell me the news, but that I should hear it later through Bessie. Such was the case. When I came home towards evening and went up stairs to prepare for supper, Bessie, who was seated in our room, said in a joyful tone—

"George is coming home next month."

"That's good," I said; and the more I thought of it the better it seemed. A new element would be infused into our home life with his advent, and I confidently believed that the widow's society would be vastly more tolerable when he was among us. George had been so long in Paris that he had become a veritable Parisian. That he would bring along with him a large amount of Paris sunshine and vivacity to enliven the atmosphere of our little circle, I felt certain.

"Is he coming to stay?" I asked.

"He don't know. He says he never makes any plans for six months ahead. It will depend upon circumstances."

"Well, that's Parisian. I'm very glad he's coming, and I hope circumstances will keep him here. Isn't old Dr. Jones pretty nearly dead? Seems to me George could take his practice."

"Now, Charlie!"

"It's all right, puss; doctors must die as well as their patients."

I broached the subject to mother-in-law at the supper-table, and—*mirabile dictu!*—she agreed with me that we must keep George with us when we got him.

In November George arrived. He didn't telegraph from New York, but came right on by a night train, and, walking into the house while we were at breakfast, took us by surprise.

Mrs. Pinkerton taken by surprise was a funny phenomenon, and I'm afraid propriety received a pretty smart blow when she threw her napkin into a plate of buckwheat cakes, dropped her eye-glasses, and rushed to meet the long lost prodigal.

As for George, he brought such a gale into the house with him—there are plenty of them on the Atlantic in November—that everything seemed metamorphosed. He laughed and shouted, and hugged first one of us and then another, and finally sat down and ate breakfast enough for six Frenchmen, every minute ripping out some wicked little

French oath and winking at his mother with the utmost complacency. Never since I had become an inmate of the cottage had we enjoyed a meal so much as that one. There was an abandon, an insouciance, an *esprit*, a *je-ne-sais-quoi* about this young frog-eater that thoroughly carried away the whole party, including even Mrs. Pinkerton.

When George had eaten everything he could find on the table, he lighted a cigarette—right there in the dining-room, too, and under his mother's eyes—and we had a good, long, jolly talk together, Bessie sitting between us, and feasting her eyes on her brother's comeliness. He certainly was handsome.

"I have no plans," he said, "except to loaf here a while and wait for an opening." "A French Micawber," said I. "And I suppose you know all about medicine and surgery?"

"I have learned when not to give medicine, I believe; and so, I think, I can save lots of lives."

A few days after George's arrival we received a call from the Watsons. I had never had the pleasure of meeting the Watsons, but I had had the Watsons held up before me as examples of the right sort of style so many times that I felt already well acquainted with them.

Mr. Watson was a very retiring, quiet little man, awed into obscurity by his wife. After a long and persistent effort to interest him in conversation, I was compelled to give it up, and to leave him smiling blankly, with his gaze directed toward the Argand burner.

Mrs. Watson was immense in every sense of the word. Her moral and mental dimensions were awe-inspiring; and she delivered what I afterwards found, on reflection, to be very common-place utterances in a style in which unctious, dogmatism, self-satisfaction, and finality were predominant. Once, when she had brought forth an unusually imposing sentence, her husband fairly smacked his lips.

The Watsons had no children. They were among the most prominent attendants of St. Thomas', and the old gentleman was reputed to be worth about a million.

George came in while the call was in progress, and after greeting the Watsons, he turned to Mrs. W., and uttered one of the most polished, delicate, pleasing little compliments it has ever been my fortune to hear uttered. Then he quietly withdrew into his background.

Then some more callers were announced, and what was my surprise to see Mr. Desmond and Miss Van Dusen enter. The former was as resplendent as to his watch-

chain as ever, and his niece looked charming. Introductions all round followed, and the company broke up into groups.

George took a seat near Miss Van, and a brisk fire of conversation was soon under way between them, varied by frequent bursts of friendly laughter.

Mr. Desmond soon drew out Mr. Watson, and their talk was on stocks, bonds, and the like.

After Mrs. Watson had proved her theory of the laws of the universe, and had almost intoxicated my worthy mother-in-law with her glittering rhetoric, the Watsons took their departure. Before the others followed their example, Miss Van extended an informal invitation to us to attend a "social gathering" at her uncle's residence the following Wednesday evening.

We went, of course, Mrs. Pinkerton, George, Bessie, and I. It was a pleasant party, and it could not have been otherwise with Miss Van as the hostess. There was a little dancing—not enough to entitle it to be called a dancing party; a little card-playing—not enough to make it a card-party; and there was a vast amount of bright and pleasant conversation, but still one could not name it a *conversazione*. The company was remarkably good, and Miss Van's management, although imperceptible, was so skilful that her guests found themselves at their ease, and enjoying themselves, without knowing that their pleasure was more than half due to her *finesse*!

George was quite a lion, and I envied his easy tact, his unconscious grace of manner, and his faculty of saying bright things without effort. He and Miss Van got on famously together, and she found him an efficient and trustworthy aid in her capacity as hostess.

Mrs. Pinkerton made a lovely wall-flower, and I could not refrain from a wicked chuckle when I saw her sitting on a sofa, exchanging common-places with a puffing dowager. Presently, however, I noticed that she had gone, and I found that Mr. Desmond had been kind enough to relieve me from the onerous duty of taking her down to supper.

I wish I had a printed bill of fare of that supper, for even George, fresh from Vefour's and the Tris Freres Provencaux acknowledged that it was sublime, magnificent, perfect. We men folks, in fact, talked so much about it afterwards, that Bessie rebuked us by remarking that "men didn't care about anything so much as eating."

As Fred Marston remarked to me, while helping himself a third time to the salad, "It's a stunning old lay-out, isn't it?" His wife was there,

dressed "to kill," as he himself said, and dancing with every gentleman she could decoy into asking her.

After we had come up from the supper room, Fred Marston pulled me into a corner, and inflicted on me a volley of stinging observations about the people in the room. George, Bessie, Mrs. Pinkerton, and Miss Van were, I supposed, in one of the other rooms; I had lost sight of them.

"Old Jenks lost a cool hundred thousand fighting the tiger at Saratoga," this last summer," said Fred. "I had it from a man who backed him. Do you know that young widow talking with him near the end of the piano? No? Why, that's Mrs. Delascollies, and a devil of a little piece she is—twice divorced and once widowed, and she isn't a day over twenty-five. You ought to know her. By the way, that brother of yours is a whole team, with a bull-pup under the wagon. Does he let old Pink boss him around as she does you?"

"It's a fine night," I said.

"Delightful! I say, Charlie, it must be a terrible bore to lug the old woman around to all these shindigs with you, hey!"

"What do you think about the State election?" I demanded.

"The Republicans have got a dead sure thing, I'll lay you a V. She has bulldozed you till you don't dare open your head, my boy. Yours is one of the saddest and most malignant cases of mother-in-law I ever struck."

"Fred," I said, in hopes of bringing his tirade to an end, "your friendship is slightly oppressive. Confine your attentions to your own grievances. I will take care of mine."

"Ah! at last you acknowledge that you have one. Confess, now, that old Pink is a confounded nuisance!"

"Well, then, yes, she is? Does that satisfy you, scandal-monger? Now, for Heaven's sake, shut up!"

I heard a brisk rustling of silk just at my left and a little back of where I sat, and some one passed toward the front parlour.

"By Jove!" ejaculated Fred, looking intently. "It's old Pink herself, and I hope she got the benefit of what we said about her. I had no idea she was sitting near us."

"What we said about her!" I repeated. "I didn't say anything about her."

"Yes, you did. Ha, ha! You said she was a confounded nuisance!"

I shuddered.

"Oh, well, brace up! Perhaps she didn't hear that impious remark," said Fred chuckling maliciously. "Or if she did, perhaps she'll let you off easy: only a few hours."

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the dark closet, or bread and water for a day or two."

"Confound your mischief-making tongue!" I growled. "Here comes Miss Van Dusen to bid you quit spreading scandal about her guests."

Miss Van Dusen, on the contrary, only wished Mr. Marston to secure a partner for the Lancets, which he promptly did.

I sat brooding while the dancing went on, and was somewhat astonished, when it was over, to see George making for my corner.

"How's this?" he said. "Didn't you go home with them?"

"With them. What! You don't mean to say—"

"But I do, though! Bessie and mother made their adieu half an hour ago, and I thought, of course you had gone home with them, as, nothing was said to me. This is a pretty go! Bessie must have been ill."

"Nonsense!" I exclaimed. "I should have known if that was the case. Where's Miss Van?"

"I saw her. She thought it was odd, but supposed you had gone with them. What could have started them off in that fashion?"

"Well, well, don't let's stand here talking. Come on."

We did not stop for ceremony. Rushing up stairs, we donned our hats and coats, and made our way out to the sidewalk without losing any time. I hailed a carriage, and we drove rapidly out of town. It was about half past one o'clock when we arrived home. There were lights in our room and in Mrs. Pinkerton's chamber. George followed me up stairs, and I tapped at the door of our room.

"Is it you, Charlie?" said Bessie's voice.

"Yes—and George."

She opened the door. It was evidently not long since their arrival home, for she had not begun to undress.

"Explain for our benefit, the new method of leaving a party," said George, "and why it was deemed necessary to give us a scare in inaugurating the same." He threw himself into an easy chair.

"Perhaps Mr. Travers is better able to tell you why mother should have left in the way she did," said Bessie, trying to make her speech sound sarcastic and cutting, but finding it a difficult job, with her breath coming and going so quickly.

"The dence he is!" roared George. "Come, Charlie, what have you been up to? I must get it out of some of you."

"I am utterly unable to tell you why, your mother should have left in the way she did," was all I could find to say.

"Baptist! This is getting mysterious and blood-curdling. The latest scuffleton in

nothing to it. Must I go to bed without knowing the cause of this escapade? Well, so be it. But let me tell you, young woman, that it wasn't the thing to do. If you find your husband flirting with some siren, you must lead him off by the ear next time, but don't sulk. Good night."

George walked out and shut the door after him.

"See here, Bessie," I said kindly, "don't cry, because I want to talk sensibly with you."

She was sobbing now in good earnest.

"I want you to tell me what your mother said to you about me."

She couldn't talk just then poor little woman! But when she had had her cry partly out, she told me.

Her mother had not told her a word of what had passed between Fred Marston and me! The outraged dignity of the widow would not admit of an explicit account of the unspeakable insult she had received. She had simply given Bessie to understand that I had uttered some unpardonable infamous slander, and had hustled the poor girl breathlessly into a cab and away, before she fairly realized what had happened.

I then told Bessie what our conversation had been, and left her to judge for herself. I had not the heart to scold her for her part in the French leave-taking, though it made me feel miserable to think how few episodes of such a sort might bring about endless misunderstandings and heart aches.

Of course more or less talk was caused by the mysterious manner of our several departures from Miss Van's party; and, thanks to Fred Marston and his wife and similar rattle-pates, it became generally known that there was a skeleton in the Pinkerton closet.

Miss Van soon heard how it came about, and nothing could have afforded a more complete proof of her refinement of character than the delicacy and tact with which she ignored the whole affair.

CHAPTER VIII.

ANOTHER CHARLIE IN THE FIELD.

The winter, with its petty trials and contentions, had gone by; spring, with its bloom and fragrance, was far advanced; and already another summer, with its possible pleasures and recreations, was close upon us. Before it had fairly set in, however, an event of extraordinary importance was to occur in our little household. There had been premonitions of it for some time, which had a tendency to soften and soothe all asperities, and cause a rather sober and subdued air to pervade the little cottage, and

Now there were active preparations going on; of course, the widow was gradually assuming the management of the whole affair, and it was a matter in which I could hardly venture to dispute her right. Her experience and knowledge were certainly superior to mine, and it was an affair in which these qualities were very important. In fact, I seemed to be counted out altogether in the preparations, as if it was something in the nature of a surprise party in my honour. Mrs. Pinkerton had an air of mysterious and exclusive knowledge concerning the grand event. Miss Van, who had come to have confidential relations with Bessie, of the most intimate kind, notwithstanding the mother's objections, knew all about it, but had a queer way of appearing unconscious of anything unusual. There seems to be a general consent to a shallow pretence that I was in utter and hopeless ignorance. It annoyed me a little, as I flattered myself that I knew quite as much about what was coming as any of them, and I thought it silly to make believe I didn't, and to ignore my interest in the affair. Bessie had no secrets from me, of course, and our understanding was complete, but one might have thought from appearances that we had less concern in the matter than anybody else.

As the auspicious time drew near, the goings-on increased in mystery and the widow's control grew more and more complete. Bessie showed me one day a wardrobe that amused me immensely. It was quite astonishing in its extent and variety, but so liliputian in the dimensions of the separate garments as to seem ridiculous to me.

"Aren't they cunning?" said the dear girl, holding up one after another of the various articles of raiment. Then she showed me a basket, marvellously constructed, with a mere skeleton of wicker-work and coverings of pink silk and fine lace, and furnished with toilet appliances that seemed to belong to a fairy; and finally, removing a big quilt that had excited my curiosity, she showed me the most startling object of all—a cradle. I had seen such things before and felt a peculiar thrill, but this had a strange effect on me. I didn't stop to enquire how it came, and all been smuggled into the house without my knowledge or consent, but I was very fondly, and went down stairs in a musing and pensive mood.

The next day a decree of virtual exile was pronounced upon me. My mother-in-law thought perhaps it would be better if I would occupy another room in the house for a time, and let her share

Bessie's chamber. The poor, dear girl might need her care at any time, and the widow looked at me as much as to say, "You cannot be expected to know anything about these matters, and have nothing to do but obey my directions." I consented without a murmur or the least show of resistance, for I admitted everything that could possibly be said, and lost all my spirit of independence in view of the impressive event that was coming. So I meekly took to the attic, and put up with the most forlorn and desolate quarters. One or two mornings after, I was aroused at an inhuman hour, and ordered in the most imperative tones to call in Dr. Lyman as quickly as possible, and haste after Mrs. Sweet. I hurried into my clothes in the utmost agitation, raced down the street in a manner that led a watchful policeman to stop me and inquire my business, rung up the doctor with the most unbecoming violence, and delivered my errand up a speaking-tube, in answer to his muffled, "What's wanted?" Then I rushed to the neighbouring stable, and got up the sleepy hostler with as much vehemence in my manner as if he were in danger of being burned to death, and induced him to harness a team, in what I considered about twice the necessary length of time; drove three miles in the morning twilight for Mrs. Sweet, a motherly old maid in the nursing business, who had officiated at Bessie's own debut upon the stage of life. When I had got back and returned the team to the stable, and was walking about the lower rooms in a restless manner, feeling as if I had suddenly become a hopeless outcast, the doctor came down stairs, and said, with amazing calmness, as though it was the most commonplace thing in the world—

"Getting on nicely. Fine boy, air! Mrs. Travers is quite comfortable. Will look in again in the course of the evening."

Then I was left alone, an outcast and a wanderer in my own home. All the life was up stairs, including the wee bit of new life that had come to venture upon the perils and vicissitudes of the great world. It was two hours, but it seemed a month, before any one relieved my solitude, and then it was at Bessie's interposition—in fact, a command that she had to insist upon until her mother was afraid of her getting excited—that I was admitted to behold the mysteries above.

Well, it is nobody's business about the particulars of that chamber. It was too sacred for description; but there was the tiny, quivering, red new-comer, already dressed in some of the dainty liliputian garments, and very much astonished, and not altogether pleased at the effect. Bessie was proud and

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happy, the nurse, moving about silently, knew just what to do and how to do it, and the mother-in-law held supreme command. She was grand and severe, and evidently her wishes had been disregarded in respect to the sex of her grandchild. She feared the consequences of another Charlie launched into a world already too degenerate, and she had hoped for an addition to the superior sex. But Bessie and I were mightily pleased that it was a boy.

There was little to be said then, but in a few days the restraint began to be relaxed, and discussions arose about what had become the most important member of the household. Even the widow must be content with the second place now, but I began to have misgivings lest my position had been permanently fixed as the third. In my secret mind, however, I determined to assert my rights as soon as Bessie was strong again, and reduce my mother-in-law to the position in which she belonged. I had put off doing it too long, and advantage might be taken of the present juncture of affairs to strengthen her claim to supremacy, and it really wouldn't do to delay much longer.

"I think he looks just like Charlie," said Bessie to Miss Van, the first time the latter called after the great event.

"Well, I don't know," was the reply. "It seems to me he has his papa's dark eyes, but I can't see any other resemblance."

"Oh, I do!" Bessie replied with spirit. "Why, it is just his forehead and mouth, and his hair will be just the same beautiful brown when he grows up."

The old lady was looking on reproachfully, and finally said, "Bessie, my dear, that child looks precisely like your own family. George at his age was just such an infant; you couldn't tell them apart."

George entered the room at that moment, and with his boisterous laugh said, "You don't mean to say that I was ever such a little, soft, ridiculous lump of humanity as that, do you?"

"As like as two peas," was the reply of his mother.

For my part I kept out of the discussion, for I must confess I could see no resemblance between the precious baby and any other mortal creature, except another baby of the same age. I thought they looked pretty much all alike, and was not prepared to deny that it was the exact counterpart of anybody at that particular stage of development.

"I tell you what, Bessie," said George, after the debate had fully subsided, "you must name that little chap for me."

"Oh, no," replied the proud mother, "that is all settled; his name is Charlie."

Nothing had been said on the subject be-

fore, and I was a little startled at Bessie's positive manner, for I thought even this matter would not be free from her mother's dictation. The old lady seemed surprised and vexed. "George's is a much better name, I think," she said very quietly, keeping down her vexation, "but I thought perhaps you might remember your dear father in this matter. His name, you know, was Benjamin."

"Yes, I know," said Bessie, very firmly, "but I think there is one with a still higher claim, and the child's name is Charles."

"Good for you, little girl!" I thought, but I said nothing. Within me I felt a gleeful satisfaction at Bessie's spirit, which showed that if it ever came to a sharp contest with her mother, nothing could keep her from holding her own place by her husband's side. All my misgivings about her possible estrangement by her mother's influence vanished, and I saw that the new tie between us would be stronger than any earthly power.

"Well," said George abruptly, after a pause, "I wouldn't be so disobliging at a little thing like that."

"Ah! you wait until you can afford the opportunity of furnishing names, and see what you will do," I said jokingly. My joke was not generally appreciated. The widow gave me a look a little short of savage. Bessie suppressed a smile, in order to give me a reproof with her eyes, and Miss Van just then thought of something wholly irrelevant to say, as if she had not noticed my remark at all. On the whole, I was made to feel that it was a disgraceful failure.

CHAPTER IX.

THE SHADOW ON OUR LIFE.

Another summer with all its glory was upon us. It was nearly a year since we were married, and I was beginning to feel the dignity of a family man. As Bessie regained her strength and bloom, she seemed to have a matronly grace and self-command quite new to her. As I looked back over our married life I saw no dark shadows, no coldness between us two, no misunderstandings that need occasion regret, but somehow it seemed as though that year had not been so bright and happy as it ought to have been. We had lived under an irksome restraint that was depressing. I had felt it more than Bessie, for she had been accustomed to submit to her mother, and did not chafe, but she plainly saw that my life had not that blitheness that would have been natural to me, and which she would have been glad to give it.

It was the presence and influence of the mother-in-law that gave a chill to my home life, and yet I accuse the good woman of no special offence. She was no vulgar meddler, and never wished or intended to mar our domestic felicity. She had managed to keep control of our household arrangements and we had passively acquiesced, but I felt that it would be better if Bessie would take command and cater more to our own desires. We could then have things our own way, and her position would be more becoming as the lady of the house. She began to regard it in the same light herself. Our social life, too, had been restrained and restricted. I was very fond of having my friends about me, and wished them to come in for the evening or to dinner or to pass a Sunday afternoon in our little bower, as often as they could find it agreeable. Mrs. Pinkerton made no open objections, but I knew the company of my friends was not congenial to her, and so was reluctant and backward in my invitations to them. Besides, they were apt to be chilled and disconcerted by the widow's stately presence and rebuking ways, and were disinclined to make themselves quite at home with us. Fred Marston and his wife had been quite driven away. Mrs. Pinkerton had declined to speak to the latter, and had told the former in plain terms that he used language of which no gentleman would be guilty.

"By thunder!" roared the impulsive fellow, "I'll have you understand that my wife and I are just as good as you, with your cursed airs of superiority!" and he stormed out of doors, and incontinently returned to town. When I met him afterwards he condescendingly declared that he didn't blame me, except that I ought to be a man and not allow "old Pink" to insult my guests. I did not particularly regret his discontinuing his visits, for, to tell the truth, I did not like his manners, and he had drifted into a circle and among associates not at all to my taste; but it galled me to have any one whom I chose to entertain driven out of my house.

I think nothing saved our charming friend, Miss Van Duzen, to whom we had both become greatly attached, from being gracefully snubbed and insulted, except the presence of her uncle, whenever she came out to visit us in the evening. Mr. Desmond's indisputable social rank, his unimpeachable demeanour as a gentleman, and the dignity and impressiveness of his presence, though it could by no means overawe my mother-in-law, made it impossible even for her to give him an affront. Besides, she seemed to have a real respect for that fine old gentleman. She would doubtless have thought better of him if he had been a regu-

lar attendant at St. Thomas's Church, but she could not learn that he was very constant at any sanctuary. His views were decidedly what are called liberal, and yet he was very considerate of the religious beliefs and practices of others, and would cheerfully acknowledge the worthy aims and good works of all the different Christian denominations. He seemed to understand why other persons should choose to join one or another, while he preferred to stand aloof, have his own ways of thinking, and do whatever good he might in his own way. He had large business interests and great wealth, and though he maintained his mansion in the city in great elegance, his family expenses were comparatively small, and he was reputed to make it up fully by supporting more than one poor family in a quiet way. He was liberal in his conduct as well as his belief, and his character and habits were above the reproach of the severest critic. Hence it was that the widow was forced to respect at least this one of our visitors, and to treat his niece with common civility, though cordiality was out of the question.

In fact, we owed to Mr. Desmond not a little for what relief we obtained in our social life from the chilling restraints of the mother-in-law's presence. He seemed to take a real pleasure in coming out to our little snugery. His stately establishment in town could not be very home-like. His niece presided over it with great skill, and saw that every wish or taste of his was gratified. She could always entertain him with her sprightly wit, and their social occasions were among the most elegant in the city. He had his club to go to, which furnished every means that ingenuity and lavish resources could contrive to minister to the pleasures of man. And yet, there was wanting to his life that element that was the essence of home. He had longed for it when he was young, and had provided for it in his household; but the wife of his youth had been called from him early, and he had vainly tried to fill all his life with business, with silent works of charity, with elegance and profusion in his house, with his clubs, his studies, and his travels; but still there was a void, and when he came to visit us, he seemed to feel something akin to the home feeling in our little circle. So he came far oftener than was to be expected of one in his position. Clara was his exouse, but it was plain to see that he liked to come on his own account, and he made himself very agreeable to us all; and when he came, we noticed the chilling influence of Mrs. Pinkerton much less than when he was not there.

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generally Bessie and I against Clara and George, but the widow had no objection to whilst and was occasionally induced to take a hand, while Mr. Desmond was quite fond of the game and was a consummate player. When we young people made up the set, Mr. Desmond would converse with the widow, for though reticent where politeness did not call upon him to talk, he was incapable of the rudeness of sitting silent with one other person, or in a small party of intimate friends; and these conversations, showing his wide information on all manner of subjects, his sympathy with all charitable movements, and his tolerant regard even for the widow's pet ideas on church and society, evidently increased her respect for him.

George must not be forgotten as a member of our circle, and never can be by those who were in it. His vivacity did much to relieve us from the depression that brooded over us. He and Clara Van, as he had taken to calling her as a sort of play upon caravan—for was she not a whole team in herself? he would say—he and Clara had many a lively contest of words, and were well matched in their powers of wit and repartee.

Thus there were lights as well as shades, relief as well as depression, in our social life, but over it all was a shadow, the shadow of my mother-in-law.

CHAPTER X.

MY MOTHER-IN-LAW SUBDUED.

As I was saying, I made up my mind that our happiness was marred by habitual submission to my mother-in-law, and I determined to shake off the nightmare, to assert myself, and to reduce that stately crown of gray puffs to a subordinate place. How was I to do it? There was nothing that I could make the cause of direct complaint, and it was hard to get into a downright conflict which would involve plain speaking. I consulted with Bessie, and she agreed with me, and promised to assume the direction of household affairs. She did not like to hurt her mother's feelings, but she admitted that it was best for her to be mistress. I could not but admire the matronly firmness and tact with which she played her part. She gave her orders and told her mother what she proposed to do, and then proceeded to execute it as if there was no room for question. If opposition was made, she very quietly and firmly insisted. Her mother was astonished and had some warm words, in which she accused me of trying to set her daughter against her.

"Oh, no," said Bessie, "Charlie does not wish to set me against you or to have you

made unhappy, but he thinks it better that I should be the mistress here, and I quite agree with him, and propose henceforth to be the mistress."

The widow was not offended, but hurt. She had too much good sense not to see the propriety of our decision, and she surrendered and tried not to appear affected.

This was the first victory. Another time, at the table, she had exercised her prescriptive right of extinguishing me for some remark of which she did not approve. I fired up and remarked, "I have the right to speak my own opinion in my own house, Mrs. Pinkerton."

"Certainly you have a right to speak your own opinion in your own house," she replied, with the least little sarcastic emphasis on "your own house," which cut me to the quick.

"But you don't seem to think so," I said. "You have had a way of snubbing me and putting me down which I don't propose to tolerate any longer. I am master of my own conduct and of my household, and I hope, in future, that my liberty may not be interfered with."

The widow's lip quivered, her great eyes moistened, and she left the table, not because she was offended, but to hide her injured feelings. I felt mean, and would have apologized, but that I felt that my cause was at stake. There was no after-explanation. My mother-in-law came and went about the house as usual, calm and polite. A silly woman would have refused to speak to me for some weeks; but she was not a silly woman, and took pains to speak with the most studied politeness, and to avoid offence. Here, too, she had evidently surrendered.

This was victory number two. One more and the battle was won. It was a Sunday in June. I had especially invited Mr. Desmond and his niece to come out to dinner and to spend the afternoon, and had insisted to Fred Marston that he should come with his wife. I wanted to vindicate my right to have what friends I pleased, and then I didn't care overmuch if I never saw him again. Mrs. Pinkerton had gone to church alone as usual. For some weeks Bessie had been unable to accompany her, and I preferred the sanctuary at which the scholarly, but heterodox, Mr. Freeman preached. When she returned, our guests had arrived. She put up her eye-glasses as she entered the gate, and looked about with evident disapproval, as we were scattered over the lawn. She didn't believe in Sunday visits. She was even stiff and distant to Mr. Desmond, and refused to see the Marstons at all, though they were directly before her eyes. She walked straight into the house.

"By Jove," said George to me in an undertone, "that isn't right! I shall speak to mother about cutting your guests in that way."

"Never mind," I replied, "don't you say a word; I want an opportunity."

He saw it in a minute, and acquiesced with a queer smile. He fully sympathized with me, and had even encouraged me in the work of emancipation. He had the utmost respect and affection for his mother, but he said it was not right for her to make my home unpleasant.

That Sunday Mrs. Pinkerton joined us at the dinner table. I knew she would not be guilty of the incivility of staying away.

"You remember my friends, Mr. and Mrs. Marston?" said, by way of introduction, as she came in.

"I remember them very well," was the reply; "too well," the tone implied. I made a special effort to be talkative, and to keep others talking during the dinner. It was very hard work, and I met with indifferent success. It was not a pleasant dinner. Mr. Desmond alone appeared not to mind the restraint, and he alone ventured to address the widow. She was polite, but far from sociable. We contrived to pass the afternoon tolerably, but not at all in the spirit which I wished to have prevail when I had friends to visit me, and all because of that presence.

After they were gone, I took occasion to introduce the subject, for I had learned that Mrs. Pinkerton's skill in expressing her disapproval in her manner was so great that she relied on it almost altogether, and rarely resorted to words for the purpose.

I am afraid you did not enjoy the company very much to-day," I said, as we were sitting in the little parlour, overlooking an exquisite flower garden.

"No, sir," she answered, with the old emphasis on the "sir." I do not approve of company on the Sabbath, and I hoped you would never again bring those Marstons into my presence at any time."

"Excuse me, madam; but I propose to be my own judge of whom I shall invite to visit me, and of the time and occasion. I presume you admit my right to do so."

"Certainly, sir. I never disputed it, and had no intention of saying anything if you had not introduced the subject."

"I introduced the subject for the very purpose; in fact, I brought out the company for the very purpose of vindicating my right, and it would be very gratifying to me if you would concede it cheerfully, and not, by your manner and way of treating my friends, interfere with it hereafter."

I was almost astonished at my own courage

and spirit, and still more so at Mrs. Pinkerton's reply. It was dusky and I could not see her face, but her voice trembled and choked as she answered—

"God knows I do not wish to interfere with your happiness. Bessie's happiness has been my one thought for years, and now it is bound up with yours. I have my own notions, which I cannot easily discard, but I would not do or say anything that would mar your enjoyment for the world. I have long felt that I did so, and have made up my mind to make any sacrifice of pride and inclination to avoid it."

Here she actually broke down and sobbed, and I was very near joining her. "Never mind," I said at length, quite softened; "I guess we shall get along pleasantly together in the future, now that we have an understanding."

"I hope so," she said, recovering her serenity, and we relapsed into a painful silence.

This was the third and final victory, but I felt no elation over it. My mother-in-law receded somewhat into the background, but it was so much in sorrow, rather than anger, that I felt her new mood almost as depressing as the old. I didn't want her to feel injured or subdued, but evidently she couldn't help it, and the mother-in-law, though conquered, was herself still, and that congeniality that would make our life together wholly pleasant was impossible. Her existence was still a shadow, less chilling and more pensive, but a shadow in our home, and it seemed destined to stay there.

CHAPTER XI.

GEORGE'S NEW DEPARTURE.

"George is growing very restless. I don't know what ails him," Bessie said to me.

"I can guess," I said, looking wise.

"What is it?"

"Do you remember what an uneasy good-for-nothing chap one Charlie Travers was, when he first began to call on a certain young woman with conspicuous regularity?"

"O Charlie, you don't think he—"

"No, no! Now don't explode too suddenly. I wouldn't have him know that I suspect anything for the world. We won't name any names, but I keep my eyes about me, and I flatter myself I know the symptoms."

And with these mysterious words, I started for the bank, leaving to Bessie a new and delightful subject for speculation and air-castle building.

George did not come home to supper that day, but that was nothing extraordinary. I was sitting out on the porch, smoking after

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the meal, and saw him coming up the street.

"Where have you been?" I asked, as he joined me and took a seat.

"None of your business. In town."

"Is Miss Van well?" I asked mischievously.

"How should I know?"

"Come, George, you don't play the part of Innocence over well. Suppose you try Candour, and tell me where you have been."

"You mistake my identity. I'm not your baby. You will find the youthful Charlie entertaining his mother up stairs."

"A long-drawn-out, agonizing wail, proceeding from the regions above, showed how Bessie was being entertained."

"No opening yet?" I ventured to ask, changing the subject.

"Not the slightest prospect. If some of these doctors could only be inveigled into taking some of their own prescriptions! But no; they are too wise."

"The bitterness of your tone would seem to indicate that you have not enjoyed your visit to the town."

"The town be hanged, and the country too! Let's take a walk down the street. Give me a cigar, confound you! How hot it is!"

We strolled down the street.

"This is a terrible vale of tears, this world," said I. "The world is hollow, and my doll is stuffed with sawdust, which accounts for his howling."

George was silent. He pulled at his cigar ferociously, smoked it half up, threw it away, and replaced it by a cigarette.

"When a man throws away the best part of a Reina Victoria he is either flush or badly in love," said I to myself. I waited patiently for him to speak, as I was perfectly willing to receive his confidence, but I didn't have the chance. He maintained a loud silence all the way, and we walked back home as we had gone out.

"Something's up—something serious," I informed Bessie that night, "but George does not confide in me worth a cent; which I think is a little unbrotherly."

The following day George was absent from an early hour in the afternoon till long after all the household were fast asleep at night. I was awakened by a light tapping at the door of our room, and slipped out of bed without disturbing Bessie or the baby.

"Come up to my den!" whispered George, as I opened the door. "Don't wake the others."

I quietly got into my clothes, and crawled noiselessly up to George's "den," devoured by curiosity. The moment I caught sight of

his handsome face I saw that it was all trigh with him, and that he had nothing but good news to tell me. We sat down, hoisted our heels to a comfortable altitude, and George told his story. I let him tell it himself here:—

"I was feeling terribly blue yesterday, when you saw me," he began, "as you could see. In the afternoon I went into town, and, according to a previous arrangement, hired a horse and buggy and called to take her out riding."

(Of course "her" was Miss Van.)

"We had agreed to take the old Liuwood road, and follow it to the village, returning through the Maplewood Park and so getting back to the city at about six. We left the town and passed through the suburbs rapidly, until we struck into the country, and there I let the horse go his own pace, which was slow. So much the better. Miss Van Duzen was never more charming. We had the most agreeable bit of talk, and she drew me out till I amazed myself. She always does. It's no use my telling you, Charlie, but I have been a fool in my love for her ever since the night she came into this cottage like a stray beam of sunshine on a cloudy day. My heart went out of my keeping the night she called here with the old gentleman. I believe it was her freshness, her moral purity, that acted on my morbid, half *blase* spirit, like a tonic, and brought me on my feet. I'm talking random nonsense, you'll say, but why shouldn't I? I'm drunk with love. Don't laugh at me. I'll be all right by daylight, except a headache. We got to talking about ourselves. Lovers always do, don't they? You ought to know. There doesn't seem to be much else in the world worth talking about. I told her all about myself—my past, with its good and bad points, and my present hopes and purposes. It all popped out as naturally as possible. I suppose it would sound like drivel if I were to repeat it. Finally she began to laugh."

"It is dangerous to make a woman your confidant," she said. "How do you know that I can keep a secret better than any other of my sex?"

"I am not afraid on that score," said I. "This is my confessional. It is as sacred as any. Am I to receive absolution?"

"She could not fully promise that. She read me a neat little lecture. It was fascinating to thus receive correction at her hands. I pledged myself, when it was done, to follow the course laid out for me. Then I made bold to exchange roles. With some maidenly hesitation, which soon vanished, she in turn laid before me the inner history of her life. Ah, my boy, how little there

was in it to gloss over! how much to humiliate the best and noblest of us men! It was a revelation that made me prostrate myself before her. I was not worthy to hear it."

George paused, and drummed on the table with his fingers nervously.

"I may as well tell you all," he resumed. I had resolved to ask that girl to marry me when we started on our ride, but after what she said to me so simply and modestly, I positively could not do it. She expected me to speak, I know that, for she would not have told me what she did tell me, otherwise."

"So you didn't speak? Oh, stupid, stupid boy!"

"I know it. But my tongue was tied. Perhaps it was all cowardice; I can't say. I never was afraid of anyone before. I came home utterly shattered and down-hearted. To-day I gravitated back to her, after a sleepless night. She received me with the same friendly smile as usual, but there seemed to be a slight shadow over her spirits. That little, almost imperceptible change filled me with joy. I jumped to a conclusion that intoxicated me, and made the plunge at once."

"It is another case of the moth and the candle," I said to her.

"Thank you. So I am a candle? That is a fine figure of speech."

"Seriously speaking, I think we had not finished what we were talking of yesterday."

"What were we talking of yesterday?" she had the effrontery to ask. "Oh, yes, now I recollect. It was yourself. That subject, I fear, you will never finish talking of."

"Now, that's a very mean speech, all things considered," I whined. "Do you want to strike a man when he's way down?"

"Don't play Uriah Heep. I hate 'umble people. But if I have perchance pierced the thick epidermis of Parisian pride you have so long worn, I'm glad of it."

"She likes to abuse me, and I enjoy it quite as well as she. She continued to scold me and mock me for some time, to disguise her actual mood. I saw through it, and let her have her way for a while. The meekness of my replies, the greatest exaggerated harshness of her criticisms. At last I no longer attempted to reply at all. Leaning back in a corner of the sofa, I watched the play of her animated features and the light of her dark brown eyes, and felt that she was the one woman in the universe that suited me, the one woman I could respect and love passionately at the same time."

"You say truly I am a coward. I am aware of that. I admit that I am all that is detestable. If such a wretch as you describe

were to love a woman, what unhappiness for him! There could be no hope for him. He would know his own irredeemable unworthiness, and so could only slink away in shame."

"You are quite right," she cried, laughing merrily. "That would be the only course for him to pursue."

"By the way," I said, "that reminds me that my train goes out in twenty minutes."

"I rose, and she also stood up to accompany me to the door. I held out my hand. It was an unusual demonstration, and perhaps she thought it meant good-bye in earnest. At least, as she put her hand in mine, I detected a look I had never before seen in the depths of those fine eyes. With a sudden, unpremeditated, and irresistible movement, I drew her close to me, folded my arms about her, and kissed her passionately."

"Clara!" I whispered, "I love you! I love you! Don't tell me to go."

"She gently drew herself out of my reluctant arms and though her eyes were misty now, I saw in them that I was to stay."

"That's all the story I have to tell you, Charlie. I am too happy to-night to sleep, so I couldn't let you sleep. I stayed and spent the evening. Mr. Desmond, bless his old heart! cried over Clara, and gave her an old-fashioned blessing. I walked home on air. Do I look very badly corned?"

I gave him a rousing hand-shake, and wiped away a stray bit of moisture from my cheek.

"May I tell Bessie?" were my first words when I found my tongue.

"Why not? There will be no long engagement in this case. The knot shall be tied as soon as possible."

The announcement I made to my little wife the following morning was not entirely unexpected, yet it filled her with delight. Miss Van was the woman of all others that Bessie wished to have George marry. The arrangement was, therefore, completely to her satisfaction, and she beamed upon the happy George with true sisterly affection.

What effect would the news have upon Mrs. Pinkerton? I asked myself. I had not long to wait for an answer, for it was at the breakfast-table that George fired the shot.

"Mother," said the bold youth, "I'm going to be married."

His mother abruptly stopped stirring the coffee, and her spine visibly stiffened, but she said nothing.

"The event will occur without delay. Of course it is useless to inform you who is the—"

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"Quite useless," Mrs. Pinkerton broke in; "my wishes in the matter are not of the slightest consequence to you."

"On the contrary. Now look here; don't be so infernally quick to anticipate my wilfulness. I want to conform to your wishes if I can. *Que faire?*"

"We will talk about it after breakfast."

Accordingly, there was a serious passage-at-arms in the library after breakfast. George left the house a conqueror, but the conquered had no sort of intention of abandoning the campaign after a Bull Run defeat. In fact, war had only just been declared. It must not be supposed that it was a war the movements of which could be followed by the acutest military observer; the batteries were all masked, but the gunpowder was there. I felt confident that George would carry everything before him; and he did. He brought Miss Van over to spend the evening, and we had the pleasantest time imaginable. He would not allow his mother to say one word against Miss Van, and made a fair show of proving that the latter had, not only better blood, but also better breeding and a truer sense of propriety than my mother-in-law, that is, "when it came to the scratch," as George said. "But who would give a snap for a young woman who can't throw aside the shackles of conventionality once in a while, and be herself?"

Miss Van was her own loliest, sweetest self at this time. Her beauty had never been so noticeable: joy is an excellent cosmetic, and love paints far better than rouge or powder.

As soon as Mrs. Pinkerton had recovered from her defeat, and when the engagement had become an acknowledged fact which all the world might know, the wedding began to loom up before us, and I could not help wondering if St. Thomas's Church was to be the scene of, as fashionable and grand a display as on the occasion when Bessie and myself were made one.

I felt reasonably certain that Mrs. Pinkerton would make an effort to that end, and I was curious to see how George would look on it.

Bessie, I think, would have been glad to see the marriage take place with as much pomp and show as possible. She was intensely interested in what Clara should wear, and every visit from that young woman was the occasion for a vast deal of confidential and no doubt highly important *tele-a-tele* consultation.

Mother-in-law sailed into the library one evening with unusual celerity of movement.

"George, dear," she said, "this cannot be true! You would not permit such an ec-

centric, uncivilized proceeding. Surely you will not offend our friends by—"

"Avast there! Our friends be hanged!" cried George wickedly. "Yes, it's true, too true. The ceremony will be private, and no cards. You can come, though! Next Wednesday, at two o'clock, sharp!"

This was cruel. I could see his mother almost stagger under the blow. She attempted to remonstrate, but it was too late. George assured her that "it was all fixed," and that Clara had agreed with him regarding the details.

"Honest old John Stephens will tie the knot," said he, "and it will be just as tight as if Dr. McCanon manipulated the holy bonds. I trust we shall have the pleasure of your company, mother. Consider yourself invited. A few of the choicest spirits will be on hand. Clara will wear the most exquisite gray travelling suit you ever laid eyes on."

The widow was flanked, outgeneralled, routed along the whole line. She brought forward all her reserve forces of good-breeding, and thus escaped a disastrous panic by retiring in good order.

The ceremony occurred, as George had announced, the following Wednesday. The near relatives and best friends of the young couple were present, and it was a quiet and thoroughly enjoyable affair for all who participated. An hour after they had been pronounced man and wife, George and his bride rode away to take the train for the mountains.

"And on her lover's arm she leant,
And round her waist she felt it fold,
And far across the hill they went
In that now world which is the old."

CHAPTER XII.

BABY TALK, OLD DIVES, AND OTHER THINGS.

The cottage seemed dull enough after the departure of George with his bride. Bessie was so absorbed by the care of our little one that she had very little time to think of anything else, and in fact the new comer, for the time being, monopolized the attention of his grandmother as well as of his mother. I was therefore left to my own resources.

"Baby is not very well, Charlie," Bessie informed me, one morning, with an anxious air. "Do you think it would do to wrap him up well and take him for a little ride this afternoon?"

"Yes, that's a good idea. If I can get that black horse at the livery stable, I'll bring him round this afternoon. But I don't see why you should wrap him up. It's hot as blazes."

"You don't know anything about babies,

Charlie. Go along. Get a nice, easy carriage, and we'll take mother with us. I long for a ride."

I departed, and secured the desired "team."

Towards two o'clock I drove up to the cottage, and the entire family banded into the vehicle, and we were off. I chose a pleasant, shady road, and drove slowly, while Bessie and her mother filled the air with baby talk.

As we were climbing the hill near Linwood, I saw, a short distance ahead of us, the form of an elderly gentleman toiling up the ascent in the sun. He seemed fatigued, and stopped as we drew near him, to wipe the beads of perspiration from his brow.

"Why, it's Mr. Desmond!" exclaimed Bessie.

Sure enough! As he turned toward us I recognized the white vest, the expansive shirt-front, and the resplendent watch-chain that could belong to no other than "old Dives" himself.

"How d'ye do?" I cried, halting our fiery steed.

"Ah! Mr. Travers, Mrs. Pinkerton, how do you do? Deighted to meet you. 'Tis very warm."

"How came you so far out in the country afoot?" I asked.

"I had some business at Melton, and lost the 2:30 train back to town, so I started to walk to Linwood with the purpose of taking a train on the other road. They told me it was only a mile and a half, but—" And he sighed significantly.

"How fortunate that we met you," said Mrs. Pinkerton quickly, taking the words out of my mouth. "Get in and ride to Linwood with us. We have a vacant seat, you see."

I seconded her invitation, and without much hesitation he accepted, and took a seat by my side. The conversation turned naturally upon the "young couple" (Bessie and I were no longer referred to in that way), and Mr. Desmond extolled his niece unreservedly. Mother-in-law was evidently somewhat impressed, but I think she made some mental reservations.

"Will you smoke, Mr. Desmond?" I asked, offering him a cigar.

"No, I thank you."

"Oh, I had forgotten you did not approve of the habit. Excuse me."

Mrs. Pinkerton explained to Mr. Desmond apologetically, that I was an irresponsible victim of the nicotine poison. I laughed, but Mr. Desmond received the explanation solemnly, and expressed his abhorrence for "the weed."

The old gentleman professed great admi-

ration for baby, and said that he looked exactly like his mother; in fact, the resemblance was almost startling.

By the time we had got to Linwood, our passenger had talked himself into a state of good-humour, and we left him at the railway station, bowing and smiling with true old school aplomb.

Bessie thought the ride did Charlie, junior, good, and so it became a regular thing, on pleasant afternoons, to take him out for a little airing. Mrs. Pinkerton overcame her scruples, and usually accompanied us. A sample of the sweet converse held with my son and heir on the back seat will suffice:—

"Sodywazzaleetlecatchykums! 'Eesodavaboobangy! Mamma's cunnin' kitten-baby?"

One day, just before noon, when I had been making a mental calculation as to how I should be able to cover the livery-stable bill, a fine equipage stopped in front of the bank, and through the window I saw the stately driver hand a note to our errand-boy. In a moment Tommy appeared in the room and handed me the billet, which ran thus:—

MY DEAR MR. TRAVERS,—I trust you will not take it amiss if I send my coachman out your way once in a while to exercise the ponies. Since Clara's taking-off, they have stood still too much, and knowing that you go to ride occasionally with your family, I take the liberty of putting them at your disposal for the present, with instructions to John, who is a careful and trustworthy driver, to place himself at your service whenever you are so disposed. The obligation will be entirely on my part, if you will kindly take a turn behind the ponies whenever you choose. My regards to your wife and Mrs. Pinkerton.

Believe me, yours sincerely,

T. G. DESMOND.

I could find no objection to accepting this kindly offer, so delicately made, but I did not dare to do so before consulting Bessie and her mother, so I stepped into the carriage and had John drive me to the cottage. There was a consultation, and after I had overcome some feeble scruples on Mrs. Pinkerton's part, which I am afraid were hypocritical, we decided to take advantage of Mr. Desmond's generosity. I sent a note of thanks back by John, and thereafter we took our rides behind "old Dives's" black ponies. Occasionally the old gentleman himself came out in the carriage, and proved himself as trustworthy and careful a driver as John, handling the "ribbons" with the air of an accomplished whip. The rides were very pleasant, those beautiful sum-

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mer days, and the change from a hired
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Mr. Desmond was extremely grateful.

Mr. Desmond was doubtless very lonely
without his niece. She had been the light of
his home, and her absence was probably felt
by the old gentleman with more keenness
than he had anticipated at the outset. His
large and beautifully furnished mansion
needed the presence of just such a person of
vivacious and cheery character as Clara, to
prevent it from becoming cheerless in its
grandeur. He intimated as much, and ap-
peared unusually restless and low-spirited
for him. He sought to make up for the ab-
sence of the sunshine and joyousness that
"Miss Van" had taken away with her, by
applying himself with especial diligence
to business; but he really had not much busi-
ness to engross his attention, beyond collect-
ing his interest and looking out for his
agents, and it failed to fill the void. He be-
took himself to his club, and killed time as-
siduously, talking with men-about-town he
found there playing whist, and running
through the magazines and reviews in search
of wit and wisdom wherewith to divert him-
self. The dull season had set in; there
was little doing in affairs, commerce, poli-
tics, or literature; and direct efforts at kil-
ling time always result in making time go
more heavily than ever. Mr. Desmond's at-
tempt was like a curious *pas seul*, ex-
ecuted by a nimble actor in a
certain extravaganza, the pecu-
liarity of which is that at every forward
step the dancer slides farther and farther
backward, until finally an unseen power ap-
pears to drag him back into the files.

It was during one of our afternoon drives,
when Mr. Desmond usurped the office of his
coachman, that he confided to us a plan
which he had devised to cure his ennui.

"I have made up my mind," he said, "to
go abroad for a good long tour. It will be the
best move I could possibly make."

"I don't doubt it," I said. "How soon
do you propose to go?" And Bessie sighed,

"O dear, how delightful!"

"My plans are not matured," Mr. Des-
mond continued, "but I think I shall sail
early next month. My favourite steamer
leaves on the 6th."

"I hope you will enjoy a pleasant voyage,
and a delightful trip on the other side," said
Mrs. Pinkerton politely.

Mr. Desmond returned thanks. Noth-
ing more was said that day concerning his
project. When he left us at the cottage, he
remarked—

"By the way, Mr. Travers, I wish you
would call at my office to-morrow morning at

or about eleven o'clock, if you can make it
convenient to do so."

"I will do so," I replied, wondering what
he could want of me.

At the appointed hour the next day I was
on hand at his office. He motioned to me to
be seated and then said—

"Yesterday morning I met John K. Blunt,
of Blunt, Brothers & Company, at my club,
and he told me that their cashier had de-
faulted. An account of the affair is in this
morning's papers. They want a new cashier.
I have mentioned your name, and if you will
go round to their office with me, we will
talk with Blunt."

"Mr. Desmond—" I began, but he stop-
ped me.

"Don't let's have any talk but business,"
he said, "The figures will be satisfactory,
I am confident."

Satisfactory! They were munificent!
Blunt liked me, and only a few short and
sharp sentences from such a man as Des-
mond finished the business. I saw a future
of opulence before me. My head was almost
turned. I tried to thank Mr. Desmond, but
he would not listen to my earnest expres-
sions of gratitude.

"I have engaged passage for the 6th," he
told me when we were parting; "I will try
to call at your cottage before I get off. I am
busy settling up some details now. Good
day."

I hastened home with my good news. Bes-
sie's eyes glistened when she heard it, and
even my mother-in-law showed a faint sign
of pleasure at my good luck.

The following Saturday evening Mr. Des-
mond came out to see us.

"Don't consider this my farewell appear-
ance," he said, "I merely wished to tell
you that my friends have inveigled me into
giving an informal party on Tuesday, at
which I shall expect you all to appear."

He talked glibly, for him, and gave us an
outline sketch of his proposed tour. I
thought he seemed strangely restless and
nervous, and I pitied him.

"His 'informal party' was really a
noteworthy affair, and the wealth and res-
pectability of the city were well repre-
sented. Bessie could not go, on account of
the baby, so I acted as escort to Mrs. Pink-
erton, who made herself amazingly agreeable.
There were not many young people present,
and the affair was quiet and genteel in the
extreme. Bank presidents, capitalists, pro-
fessional men, and 'solid' men, with their
wives, attired in black silks, formed the
majority of the guests. They were Mr.
Desmond's personal friends. My mother-
in-law was in congenial company, and I be-
lieve she enjoyed the evening remarkably.

Most of the conversation turned, very naturally, upon European travel. Americans who are possessed of wealth always have done "the grand tour," and they invariably speak of "Europe" in a general way, as if it were all one country.

"When I returned from my first tour abroad, a friend said to me that he 'supposed it was a fine country over there,'" said Mr. Desmond to me, laughing.

Some one asked him where he had decided to go.

"I shall land at Havre, and go straight to Paris," he answered. "I flatter myself I am a good American, and as I have been comparatively dead since my niece left me, I am entitled to a place in that terrestrial paradise."

I thought I had never seen Mrs. Pinkerton appear to so good advantage as she did on this occasion. Her natural good manners and her intelligence made her attractive in such a company, and she was the centre of a bright group of middle-aged Brahmins throughout the entire evening. Mr. Desmond appeared grateful for the assistance she rendered in making his party pass off pleasantly, and as for me, I began to feel that I had never quite appreciated her best qualities. She was a woman that one could not wholly know in a year, perhaps not in a lifetime. "Who knows?" I thought; "perhaps I have wronged my mother-in-law."

CHAPTER XIII.

A SURPRISE.

We were feeling a little solemn at the cottage. George, with his lively ways, and Clara, with her sparkling vivacity, were away on their wedding tour, and our good friend, Mr. Desmond, to whom we had taken a great liking, was about to sail for an indefinite absence in foreign lands. Though the mother-in-law's presence was less oppressive than formerly, there was now a pensiveness, an air of departed glory about it, that was not cheerful. There was danger of settling down to a humdrum sort of life, free from strife, perhaps, but at the same time devoid of that buoyancy which should make the home of a young couple joyous.

I was a little doubtful of making a vacation in the country this summer. To be sure, when George went away, it was agreed that after he had gone the round of the White Mountains, the attractions of Canada, Niagara Falls, and Saratoga, he would return for a quiet stay of a few weeks, at the close of the season, to the little resort which we had visited a year ago, and there, if Bessie's health would permit, and I could arrange for a sufficient

absence from business, we would join them. But I almost dreaded taking Mrs. Pinkerton with us, and doubted whether she would go; at the same time I did not like to propose leaving her behind to take care of the cottage. I was in perplexity, and, notwithstanding my splendid new prospects in business, was not feeling cheerful.

Coming home from a restless round of the city on the Fourth of July, where I had found the great national holiday a bore, I noticed Mr. Desmond's team coming up to the garden gate with a brisk turn. That fine old gentleman—I always feel like calling him old on account of his grey whiskers, though he was little more than fifty—came down the walk and with stately politeness assisted Bessie and the baby out of the carriage. I looked to see Mrs. Pinkerton follow, but she was not there, and clearly Mr. Desmond had not been to ride. It struck me as a little queer, not to say amusing, that they had been having a quiet *tete-a-tete* together in the cottage while John gave Bessie and the baby their airing. But then, it was not so strange, either, for was he not going to leave us in two days? It was no uncommon thing for Mrs. Pinkerton to stay within while Bessie was out, and he had probably dropped in late in the afternoon, expecting to find us all at home, as it was a holiday. I bade him good-bye in case I did not see him again, as he got into the carriage to ride back to the city.

"Oh, I shall see you to-morrow," he said in a brisk tone which had not been habitual with him of late.

That evening my mother-in-law was uncommonly gracious, a little absent-minded, and more pleasant in spirits than I had ever known her. She seemed to be filled with an inward satisfaction that I could not make out at all. Bessie and I both remarked it, but could not surmise any cause for the apparent change that had come over the spirit of her dream.

Next morning, on reaching town, I found a note asking me to step over to Mr. Desmond's office when I could find time. I went at my leisure, wondering what was up. As I entered he seemed remarkably cordial and happy.

"I find that Blunt," he said in a business-like way, "would like to have you take hold at once, if possible. Their affairs are in some confusion and need an experienced hand to straighten them out. It will be necessary for you to give a bond, which I have here all prepared, with satisfactory sureties, and you need only give us your signature, which I will have properly witnessed on the spot."

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"Oh, is that it?" I thought. Strange I didn't think of its having something to do with my new position. I knew I could get away from my old place at a week's notice, as I had already made known my intention to leave, and there were several applicants for the position. The bond was executed without hesitation.

"You will not lose your vacation," Mr. Desmond said, "though your salary will begin at once. As soon as you can get matters in order, which may take a month or more, you are to be allowed a few weeks' absence to recuperate and get fully prepared for your new responsibilities."

Thanking him for his kindness, I was about to go, when he said, "Sit down, Mr. Travers. I have something else to say to you."

"What's coming now?" I wondered, as I took my seat again. Mr. Desmond seemed a little at a loss how to begin his new communication, and came nearer appearing embarrassed than I should have thought possible for him.

"The fact is," he said at last, "I have changed my mind about going abroad."

I have no doubt I looked very much surprised and puzzled, and smiling at the expression of my face, he went on—

"Your mother-in-law, Mrs. Pinkerton, is a very worthy woman; in fact, a remarkably worthy woman."

I couldn't deny that; but why should he choose such a time and place to compliment her?

"Do you know," he added, with a still nearer approach to embarrassment in his manner, and something like a blush on his usually calm face, "I have asked her to become Mrs. Desmond."

"The devil you have!" was my thought, as astonishment fairly overcame me. I didn't say it, though, and it was my turn to be embarrassed, and I hardly knew what to say.

Having got it out, Mr. Desmond fairly recovered his equanimity. "Yes," he said, "I put the idea away from me a long time, but it would persist in growing upon me, and I finally concluded that perhaps it might contribute to the happiness of all parties, so I have taken the plunge. I hope you approve of it," he added, with a queer twinkle in his eye.

"With all my heart, sir," I said earnestly, "and I am sure it will be as pleasing as it is surprising to us all."

Throughout that afternoon I was restless, and eager to get home to tell Bessie the wonderful news. It was the longest afternoon I ever saw, but at length it passed and I hurried home. As Bessie met me at the

door I said eagerly, "I've got a surprise for you, deary."

Now I noticed for the first time that she was all smiles and full of something that she too was eager to surprise me with. Simultaneously each recognized that the other had the secret already. Of course; what a fool I was! Her mother naturally enough would tell her while Mr. Desmond broke the matter to me.

"Isn't it jolly?" I said.

"Why, Charlie, are you then so anxious to get rid of poor, dear mamma?" she said, half reproachfully and half teasingly.

"Oh, no, of course not, but it is really nice for all of us, isn't it now? She won't be far off, you know; we shall have our little home all to ourselves, and Mr. Desmond will be a sort of guardian for us. And as I said before, I think it is jolly."

"Well, I must confess I do not altogether like the idea of mamma marrying again, and I shall miss her very much, after all."

I couldn't help laughing at the little woman's demure countenance, as she said this. There was a little trace of jealousy in her gentle heart—jealousy so natural to woman—at the idea of another's taking her mother off. I accused her of it, and she repudiated the idea.

But everybody must admit that things had fallen out just right for all parties, and the shadow was to be taken from our household by a new burst of sunlight, without any heart-burning for anybody, and with nothing but satisfaction for all. It was arranged that the new marriage should presently occur, and the mature couple take a little trip, and surprise George and Clara by being at the Fairview Hotel before them. Their first knowledge of the turn of affairs was to come when they arrived there late in August, and found their new relations in possession. Bessie and I were to join the party for a brief stay, and so my perplexity was happily ended.

CHAPTER XIV.

A HAPPY PROSPECT.

The landscape is lovely in these latter days of August. The mountains are grand and solemn in their everlasting silence. We are together at the Fairview, and everybody feels free and happy. There is no restraint, and our future prospects are delightful. Before George left home in June he had made application for a vacant chair in the Medical College and presented his credentials and testimonials. He expect-

ed nothing from it, he said, but would leave me to look out and see what decision was made. I had brought with me the news of his appointment. I had also secured for him the refusal of an elegant house which had been suddenly vacated and offered for sale on account of the failure in business of its owner. It was very near our cottage, had lovely surroundings, was beautifully furnished, and was to be sold with all its contents. It has now been decided between George and Mr. Desmond that it shall be purchased at once, and shall become the legal possession of Clara, being paid for out of her ample fortune, now under

her own control, but not yet taken from her uncle's keeping.

Mr. and Mrs. Desmond will take possession of the city mansion, and I have no doubt that its state and elegance will be fully kept up. I see before me happy times for us all, and at last I think we understand and appreciate each other. Our relations being properly and happily adjusted, there will be no more "unpleasantness." And I must acknowledge that, in spite of past feelings and the little clouds that have flecked our sky, sometimes appearing dark and portentous, these happy results are due in no small measure to MY MOTHER-IN-LAW.

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Our relations being trusted, there will be less." And I must

rite of past feelings have flecked our dark and portentous are due in no small

EN-LAW.

